



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The Only Publication authorized by the Hon. W.F. Cody (BUFFALO BILL)

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 4.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S RIFLE RANGERS

A STORY OF ROUGH RIDING RESCUES



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
'BUFFALO BILL'

BUFFALO BILL AND PONCAPATTY, AT A BREAKNECK GALLOP, SEND SHOT AFTER SHOT AMONG THE INDIANS WITH FEARFUL RAPIDITY.



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CHAPTER I.

THE CRY ON THE WIND.

At noon of a cloudy autumn day, a frontiersman was sleeping off the effects of a long and hard ride in a small clump of cottonwoods on Dry Creek, a small South Kansas tributary of the Arkansas River, as dry as its name.

His horse, a splendid roan, was cropping the half burnt-up prairie grass near a shallow water hole not far away.

The silence of the great solitudes was unbroken by even a bird call or antelope's plaintive bleat.

But presently the horse looked up, snuffing the air and pricking his ears suspiciously, while the hunter, notwithstanding that his sleep of exhaustion had lasted but a few hours, sat up with a start, alert, and bent his head in a listening attitude.

"What was it, Buckskin, old chap?" he said, addressing the noble brute, as if he were human.

What was it? A cry on the wind—a far-away cry—perhaps as of a clear voice urging a steed. And now it was repeated, accompanied by other sounds of a harsher and more sinister note, and then two or three distant shots.

Springing to his feet, breech-loading rifle in hand, the hunter looked out from the clump in the direction indicated, not only by the sounds, but by the pointing ears and nostrils of the trained steed.

A young girl, her fair hair blowing, was riding over the grassy plains at a thundering gait, hotly pursued by a small band of armed horsemen.

Hers had been one of the shots that had just come down

on the wind, and it had evidently exhausted her ammunition.

At all events, she was waving her rifle with a half-despairing gesture, while urging her already hard-blown steed to its utmost. And it seemed but a question of brief time before she must be overtaken by her ruffianly and fresher-mounted pursuers, who, however, notwithstanding that they had fired some shots, were evidently more intent on her capture than causing her serious bodily harm.

The line of flight and pursuit led directly westward over the prairies within less than a quarter of a mile from the cottonwood clump of trees.

"Ha!" exclaimed the hunter; "Pattie Enfield, the Girl Rifle Shot, and with that hound, Jack Corters, and his Border Bandits, once more in pursuit of her!"

Buckskin, the roan, was already at his side, and to fling on saddle and bridle, and then leap to his back, without touching foot to stirrup, was the work of an instant.

The hunter guardedly disclosed himself just outside the clump, while his ringing whoop of encouragement at once attracted the attention of fugitive and pursuers alike.

Signing the former to continue her flight, he then checked the pursuers by firing three shots with lightning-like swiftness, every one of which hit its mark—one of the ruffians reeling in the saddle, dangerously wounded, and the horses of two others going down under them with a wild plunge.

The bandit leader, a large man, with a huge black beard, shook his fist furiously at the rescuer, as his band came to a confused halt.

"I recognize you, Buffalo Bill!" he bellowed out at the

top of a tremendously strong voice. "You'll yet pay for this interference with every drop of blood in your body, or my name's not Colonel Jack Corters. You know me!"

"And you may know more of me than you'll find comfortable, Colonel Jack," muttered the great scout, for it was, indeed, the already famous Buffalo Bill himself. "Good-by, and the devil's luck to you."

Then, waiting only long enough to be assured of the villains taking themselves off in another direction, where a slight rise speedily led them from view, a mere word was sufficient to start off the magnificent roan with the rapidity of the wind.

The young girl was quickly joined a mile away, where she had taken advantage of the interruption to halt and breathe her badly-winded horse.

"I am yet once again in your debt, Mr. Cody," she said, offering her hand, with a reassured little laugh and sparkling gray-blue eyes.

She was not more than seventeen, and very pretty—a light blonde, rosy-cheeked, dimpled-chinned, and yet with a quiet, self-possessed and determined air, whose significance there was no mistaking.

"Never mind that, Miss Patty, and the more of the same sort the better welcome you are," replied Buffalo Bill, with a half-gallant, half-paternal air. "But rather explain to me why and how I thus find you again thus far away from your father's sutler store at the Kaw Indian Agency?"

"I was visiting my aunt on the West Fork of the Neosho," replied Patty Enfield, better known along that wild border as Ponca Patty, the Girl Rifle Shot, with a yet more careless laugh, now that her danger was over. "Dear old dad! of course, I didn't let him know of my intention to ride back over the sixty miles to the agency alone; though I hope he may not have suspected it, and be anxious on my account, or may be even setting out in search of me. And as for Colonel Jack—Black Jack—well, he hasn't got me yet, Buffalo Bill; no, and if I hadn't had the bad luck to lose my cartridge-belt when the gang first gave me chase back yonder, leaving me but two or three loose shells for dear old Snapper here"—she patted her light breech-loader affectionately—"they might have got weary of it sooner than you made them. However, we were mighty nigh rubbed out, and no mistake. Weren't we, Purplette?" caressing her steed, a valuable coal-black mare.

"I should say so!" said Buffalo Bill, gravely. "Come!" And, in a matter-of-course, commanding way, he led off at an easy gallop to the northward of the direction that Patty had been pursuing.

"But wait, Mr. Bill," said the girl. "That isn't the way to head for the Kaw Agency."

"No, but it is for my ranch on Ruby Creek," composedly. "Come along, Patty! My wife and sisters, to say nothing of laughing Kitty, the Little Corporal's wife, will be only too glad to have you stay over night, and the agency is too far away to be thought of for the present. Besides, I can't have you roaming unprotected again, with, perhaps, Black Jack and his ruffians lurking on your trail, as is more than likely. What answer could I make to your father and my old friend, Sutler Dock Enfield, if he should meet and question me, after I had let you have your own mad-cap will?"

Ponca Patty—she had been much on the Ponca Reserve

vation, where she had first developed her notorious marksmanship with the rifle—laughed again. The idea or suggestion of her, the Girl Rifle Shot, not being able to take care of herself, and that in spite of her recent narrow escape, seemed comical to the good opinion she had of herself.

However, the prospect of visiting the agreeable women at her companion's ranch on the Ruby Creek branch of the Arkansas River was a pleasant one.

"All right," said she, without further protest on her part.

The time of this story was in one of the years directly following the close of the War of the Rebellion. The region was that still but little settled Southern Kansas border between the Missouri State line and the crossing of the Indian Territory boundary by the Arkansas River, which was then being overrun from time to time by desperate robber and raiding bands. The Indian tribes were, moreover, restless, and some of them, all along the line, giving the settlers and troops at the outlying forts and agencies all they could do.

"But look here," called out the young girl, in her frank way, after the pair had galloped along in silence for some moments. "Haven't you forgotten something on your own account?"

"Why, no; have I?" And, then, giving her a look from under his great-brimmed ranchero's hat: "But I did forget to give you a kiss, Miss Patty, if that is what you mean."

"Go on wid you, as Little Joe's Kitty might say!" cried the girl, while pretending to cut at him with her whip. "And you not a very long married man, at that? But you know what I meant," more seriously. "How did you chance to be in that clump of cottonwoods so opportunely at my hour of need?"

"I have been on a three days' scouting trip to the Missouri border, on purpose to spy on that very gang that was so hot on your trail, Patty, together with the renegade Indians and half-bloods who secretly train with them," explained the frontiersman. "And I was sleeping in the thicket. My pards and I—Wild Bill and the others—are arranging to wipe 'em out, you know, with the troopers' assistance, if necessary."

"No, I didn't know, but I rejoice to know it now," said Patty. "Oh, for a sword!" energetically, "that would sweep the murderous devils off the face of the earth. The border here will never be at peace until that happens."

"It's preparing," observed Buffalo Bill, quietly.

"You got wind of their Missouri fastness, then?" inquired the girl, eagerly.

"I musn't talk."

"Oh, I understand! But whose information put you on their trail this last time?"

"Hankin's," after a pause.

"What, the handsome halfbreed?"

"Yes."

"Still, beware of the man, Bill. He is strongly suspected at the agency not only of secretly working for the border bandits, but also of fomenting these troubles between the Sioux and the Pawnees. My father mistrusts him."

"We're not sure yet. But my pards and I have got our eyes peeled; no fear of that, Polly. But, hello!" And the scout drew up with a surprised pull.

Buckskin had suddenly manifested signs of uneasiness, which were now, on the halt being made, reflected through a strange species of equine intuition or sympathy, by Purplette, the Girl Rifle Shot's mare.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE RESCUE.

They were still fifteen miles distant from Ruby Ranch, as his little family settlement on the Arkansas was named, and Buffalo Bill was anxious, as he had already hinted to his little companion, lest his pards might have met with some trouble with the Indians on their way out to meet him.

While an Indian uprising was not yet fully under way, it was more than threatening. Not only were the Sioux and Pawnees once more at their feud, which might at any hour draw them and their respective sympathizing tribes into a bloody Indian war, but ranchmen's stock was being lifted, settlers and wagon-trains attacked, and the troops at the scattered forts and agencies having all they could do in watching the tangled situation, and keeping more or less grimly prepared for hard times. Added to all this was the dangerous influence exerted by the desperate bands of white marauders, who were enlisting many of the Indians in their wild fortunes.

Buffalo Bill's fresh dread of trouble was not long in being shown.

Shots were heard, and then when a slight rise in the grassy plain brought the pair in view of Wild Horse Creek, a small, slightly timbered tributary, midway between his ranch and their crossing of the Arkansas, a party of hunters was perceived in a clump of trees, where they were with difficulty standing off an attack on the part of a considerable body of mounted savages, with a few white renegades scattered among them.

"They're my pards, and they're having it hot and heavy," said the Border King, coming to a halt. "Here, Miss Patty," he passed a handful of cartridges to her; "see if these are a fit for your breech-loader."

It was before the era of the deadly Winchester and other magazine repeaters, the mere first principles of rapid-firing, breech-loading rifles having just come into general use.

"Yes," replied the Girl Rifle Shot, nimbly experimenting with the shells. "They fit dear little old Snapper to a T."

"Here's a few more, then." The scout passed her yet another handful, at the same time studying the brave little face critically. "Now, young lady, are you game for a charge on those bloodthirsty devils' rear?"

"My name's Patty—or Ponca Patty, if you prefer it, Bill," was the cool response. "As for the rest, try me."

"You'll do. Now, then!"

The presence of the pair had not yet been noticed by the assailants, though they were less than half a mile away.

Away they charged, scout and girl, at a breakneck gallop, and were a minute or two later whirling in upon the Indians' rear, loosening out shot after shot with fearful rapidity, so that saddles were emptied before the scoundrels could well understand what new dodge was being sprung upon them.

Then the beseiged pards sallied out of the clump on horseback, with a ringing cheer.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the assailants were fugitives in their turn. The victory was complete, and the reunion of Buffalo Bill with his gallant associates was a joyous and accomplished fact.

Most of the latter were old and welcome faces.

Chief among them was the redoubtable Wild Bill.

Then came Frank Stark, better known as Flash-shot Frank, the brave ex-rebel.

The third pard was gallant Joe Bevins, the characteristic Little Corporal companion in many a hard-fought battle for the Union, who had become the husband of sturdy and light-hearted Kitty Muldoon, the faithful servant of the Cody household, and still one of the cheerful lights in the new ranch settlement on Ruby Creek.

And last, but by no means least, was a splendid and veteran frontiersman, Tom (or Tomahawk) Towners by name.

A band of but five men, including Buffalo Bill himself; but then such men as were each a host in himself, and collectively worth a small army of men less tried and true.

The junction having been effected, the entire party lost no time in taking up the trail for Ruby Ranch.

The accoutrements of the Cheyennes, together with their riderless ponies, furthermore, became the booty of the pards.

"This shows that the Cheyennes are reg'larly on ther warpath for white scalps," commented Wild Bill. "The whites thet instigated 'em to attack us were Bill Anderson, Colonel Jack Corter's lieutenant, an' two others of the band that I also recognized."

"So did I," cried Flash-shot Frank.

At this juncture four horsemen were seen riding toward the party from the southwest.

"It's your dad, lookin' for you, Patty, with three cavalrymen from the agency as escort," said Buffalo Bill, and a halt was ordered accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOME RANCH ON RUBY CREEK.

Dock Enfield, the Girl Rifle Shot's father, and the sutler at the Kaw Indian Agency, was a brisk, determined little man, well known all along the South Kansas border, and thought to have something of a mystery behind him.

"So, you are already out, looking up truant Patty here, Mr. Enfield?" said Buffalo Bill, when the greetings and explanations were over. "Better let her go on with us to Ruby, now—and you and your escort with her, too, for that matter. It's near at hand; you've a long return jog before you to the agency, and the afternoon is already pretty nigh rubbed out."

The old trader had listened to the story of the day's adventures without comment, and was now sitting grimly in the saddle, with knitted brows and his shrewd Scotch blue-gray eyes looking straight before him at his horse's ears.

Patty could see that the old trader did not intend to let her accompany Buffalo Bill to his ranch.

The young girl looked her disappointment, but bowed her head submissively. And, as the determination of the

suttler was known to be immovable when once announced, none of the scouts interposed any expostulations, much as they might have felt like making them. Cody merely spoke a few cheerings words to the girl, who then waved her hand, as she rode away with her father and the escort.

"A hard-hearted old nut, that Dock Enfield," growled out Frank Stark, as the pards continued on their way. "Ther leetle Rifle Shot must be purty well done up, and all would have been mighty glad to have her for a day or two at Ruby."

"An' she's such a favorite with my Kitty, too," said Little Corporal Joe. "However, old Enfield allers hez been, an' allers will be, a sort of a hog."

A few minutes later the party came in sight of Ruby, and at once put their horses to a gallop as the bright and comely faces of the women and little children, together with those of some of the ranch hands, made their appearance to smilingly welcome their return.

The ranch residences were on the eastern bank of the well-wooded little creek, just at its junction with the broad and comparatively lordly Arkansas. The larger one was occupied by Buffalo Bill, his wife and sisters, and both Wild Bill and Towahawk Towners made their home there when at the settlement.

Of the two smaller near-at-hand houses, one was Frank Stark's, and the other Joe Bevins', where they lived happily with their respective helpmates.

These residences, with their numerous outbuildings, sheds, corrals and the like, made quite an imposing and village-like showing in among their green-bowering trees and trim gardens, with the bright waters of the creek and river mingling close at hand.

The buildings were fortified after a rude but effective fashion, besides being grouped with an eye to mutual defense in case of an Indian attack.

Moreover, the three full-section or square-mile ranges came here together to a common point of contact, comprising broad grazing tracts on both sides of the creek and the larger stream, which was easily fordable at most seasons of the year. This greatly aided the gathering in of the stock on the respective ranges at a common signal of alarm.

Added to this, there were neighboring and friendly ranch owners, one on either side, a mile or so away east and west, who were equally watchful and experienced.

In this way, together with the notorious fighting qualities of the proprietors and their friends, Ruby had thus far come to be severely let alone, even when other ranches along the same border were experiencing more or less trouble with both discontented savages and banded white outlaws.

It was as Buffalo Bill said to his bosom pard, Wild Bill, more as if thinking aloud than anything else, while the party were galloping toward the agreeable home scene, all peaceful and smiling in the last lingering rays of a stormy sunset:

"Ah, yes!" he muttered; "who would suppose to look at that little paradise, that an enemy could be within fifty miles of it? And yet, from what has chanced to-day, who can say how long before the red warwave will roll our way, and up to our very doors?"

"True," replied Wild Bill; "and that makes me fear

somewhat for old Enfield and his escort. could have prevented little Patty from going with them. But it can't be helped now, and the only way to keep our eyes peeled for the worst."

All the women folks, the children, and the hired cowboys were grouped together before the ranch-dwelling to welcome the adventurers, as the pards galloped up and dismounted, to the accompaniment of an animated and sympathetic cheer.

"Be off wid ye, ye sawed-off spalpeen," said the mock-angry greeting for her liege lord, little Enfield, who latter laughingly dangled his share of the scalps under her back-tilted little Irish nose, offering first one and then the other of the ones tugging at her skirts into the embrace of her gaged arms. "Och, Injun topknots an' frish, what this might signify. "Sure, an' it's a diffeent bargain?" She turned a little pale, with the thought of what this might signify. "Sure, an' it's a diffeent bargain? Oid rayther ye'd be afther bringin' me some more."

"Nonsense, Kittya" replied her husband. "This sort of pelts is necessary upon occasion when their owners would have roasted us if we could. Come, now!" and he withdrew with the little ones into their cabin.

Buffalo Bill was talking apart with his wife, having gone inside, while Mrs. Towners said:

"How glad I am that you've not had the trouble of bringing any of those horrid scalps with you. That's one thing, as you know, that, bordering on the border, I have never been able or willing to face myself with."

"Yes—er—I know, Lottie—oh, yes, of course," said Towahawk Towners, scratching his head in mortification; for he had committed his own share of topknot trophies to the cowboy who had been enough to look after his horse. "I—er—sorry I didn't take much ter them sorter tufts, so I'll be keeful not ter show up 'ith any. See?"

"That was real considerate of you, Tom," said Lottie. "Come in now, for Gretchen has a good supper ready."

In the meantime an anxious look had come over Cody's face as she learned the significant news of the day.

"I do hope we are not going to have trouble as they sat down to the table together. "And Patty have come along with you? I can't help but be troubled about her when I think of that villainous pursuit of the girl. It seems to me that it will be feared than any danger from the White Sioux, for all that old Enfield always has shown a hatred or fear of Allannah."

"Bother all this, my dear," said Buffalo Bill, while Wild Bill also spoke reassuringly, hiding whatever they might have felt to the contrary. "There'll doubtless be no more trouble but provide against. And as for Ponca Patty, of being the champion Girl Rifle Shot of the Agency, with her sturdy old dad and thrice her company?"

But secretly the scouts were anxious about

CHAPTER IV.

A PRARIE STORM AND WHAT CAME OUT OF IT.

great wind and rain storm had suddenly broken out the party were at supper, and presently the door lung open, and a young hunter entered.

Direct as an arrow, supple as a panther, and with a young dark beauty of face and mien, there was also a possessing mingling of modesty and quiet self-assurance in his manner, as he bowed and spoke his greeting, tossing his rain-dripping poncho and sombrero to the side.

"Hullo!" cried Buffalo Bill, with his accustomed frankness. "Talk of an angel, an' you hear the rustle of his wings. Draw up an' have a bite, Hank."

The unbidden guest, who was none other than a half-breed, smiled in a way that agreeably flashed to view his white teeth, and, though he pretended to ignore the perceptible coldness with which the others regarded him, it was evident that his carelessness was only the cover for something serious and even agitated underneath.

"Thank you, for the devil isn't always an angel when he comes put in an appearance," he replied, with a voice of purity of diction that matched his handsome and well-cut face. "And as for taking a bite or two, I don't care if I do, for the long ride from Pawnee Agency, to nothing of the storm, has double-edged my appetite, I can tell you. By the way, Bill, I took the liberty to send my animal to one of your men on picket guard out there."

Everybody nodded, and then Mrs. Cody, having thawed out enough to murmur an invitation, Hankins, with another friendly nod for everybody, forthwith drew up to the table that Gretchen made for him, and began to eat like a very hungry man.

He was, moreover, known beforehand, by the women at least, that he had recently been down to Pawnee, going for a garrison dance party, so that his stopping at Ruby at this time, on his way back to his own ranch, a considerable distance farther up the Arkansas, shouldn't have been such an out-of-the-way or unexpected circumstance, after all.

However, when Hankins had worn off the first edge of his appetite with no little dispatch, he looked up with a look of seriousness deepening in his dark face.

"Where's your two others?" he asked, abruptly. "I've got news for you, and maybe not the best in the world at that."

"Call in Frank an' ther Little Corporal, Gretchen!" cried Buffalo Bill.

The girl opened the door, the gusts of wind and rain best carrying her off her feet as she did so, and tooted into the night a blast or two on a dinner-horn, which took from its hook on the wall for the purpose.

Clark and Bevins speedily made their appearance in response to the summons. Then their wives also came filing in, their waterproofs over their heads and shoulders.

"What is it?" cried Lillie, her eyes wide and round at the coming of the half-breed.

"Oh, sure, an' it's something along o' thim topknots!" cried Kitty, yet more excitedly. "What did Oi tell ye, Bill?"

Hankins had already risen, and was standing, pipe in

hand, with his back to the great open chimney-piece fire, which was a grateful offset to the chill that had come on with the storm.

"It may be only a false alarm, after all. Though I thought you ought to be notified; otherwise I might have ridden on for my cabin, without stopping over. However," with a bended ear for the whistling and lashing of the tempest about the house, "then, again, I mightn't."

His story was a brief one, and was told with simple language. For Hankins—the orphaned son of a beautiful Cheyenne woman—had not only been a prize pupil at the mission schools, but had enjoyed a brief college term in St. Louis. In fact, it was not without reason that he had come to be variously known on the frontier as "Gentleman," "Dandy," and "Fiddler" Hankins quite as frequently as by his more distinctive name, though his temper—a quietly desperate one—was the reverse of such as would have tempted any one to push a familiarity or pleasantry too far with him.

His story was briefly this: Ten miles to the south-eastward, on his way up from Pawnee, he had met old Enfield, Ponca Patty, and their escort, not long after the latter party had separated from Buffalo Bill and his pard. Then, a little later on, he had encountered Colonel Jack Corter with a strong force of his Border Bandits, including the Cheyenne braves and three white desperadoes. These were now hot on the trail of the Enfield party, which they had somehow got upon, and Corter, who was eating himself up with rage over his recent rebuffs, had in the first place ordered Hankins to fall in with his gang, but, on the latter firmly refusing to do so, had vouchsafed to hurry on, without injuring him, but at the same time swearing that he would have the girl, if he should have to kill every man in her escort to get her.

Hankins had confessed to having recently met the Enfields, on purpose to put the pursuers on the false scent by his directions. But he was of the opinion that this trick could have availed little with a man of Corter's shrewdness, who would have been more likely to have kept straight on for the Kaw Agency, which would have sufficed for him to overtake the fugitives long before they could reach their destination.

Then Hankins had hurried on with the bad news to Ruby, the storm breaking upon him later on.

"That's all there is of it, friends," said he, in conclusion, while filling and lighting his pipe. "My main hope is that this same storm may have interfered with Colonel Jack's designs. It might well have done so, for it brought my Chestnut Kate to a blinding dead stop, and nearly twisted me out of the saddle when it first swooped down, and just listen to it now. *Caramba*, what a night! However, you fellows, now that you've got the story, must think all this thing out for yourselves."

Mrs. Cody and all were at once sympathetically fearful for Patty Enfield's safety, and thought that a posse should be made up to go to her rescue on the spot, but a gesture from Buffalo Bill caused them to hold their peace, at least for the time being.

They all mistrusted him more or less, though Hankins was too polite to let them see that he knew it.

Cody thoughtfully crossed the floor, and again threw open the door.

The tempest was raging with increased, rather than abated, fury.

Sim Greaves, one of the cowboys on sentry duty, rode up to the entrance, looked in at the glow and comfort, with a jocular comment, and then, shaking the rain off his rubber coat and hat, disappeared in the howling darkness.

"No trail takin' to-night," grunted the master scout, thrusting his hands in his pockets and shaking his head. And he moodily reclosed the door.

Then there rose something of a discussion, one or two thinking that the trail might possibly be taken up, and the others to the contrary.

It was ended by Hankins—who had unobtrusively brought to light his violin—in a way no less agreeable than unexpected.

He sat down, with his back against a chimney-corner, and, beating time with his small and booted foot, straightway loosened out with a rollicking Virginia reel.

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERRUPTED DANCE.

A dance? There could have been no better time for it, and it was the one pastime dear to every light-hearted woman and almost every gallant-spirited man in the room.

Stoical and Indian-like Wild Bill was the exception, though he looked on cheerfully enough.

Kitty set the example.

"It's loike a Donnybrook jig," she cried, "when the devil's in wan's feet. Come on, me darlint!"

And fairly snatching her Little Corporal out of his seat, she led off with him in a joyous whirl.

Towners followed with Lottie.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the reel was on the jump, with the four couples on the floor, and the mad dance-music screaming out on the glowing, storm-encircled cabin-snuggery with all the vim and inspiration that the half-breed's master touch could fling into it.

But, with his hot half-Indian blood coursing in his veins, to inspirit the dance with the music was not enough for the fiddler.

From beating time with one foot, he fell to beating it with both—his black eyes blazing.

"Here, Bill, come take my place!" he shouted, laughingly, to Wild Bill, who was also clever at manipulating the magic bow. "You're not shaking a foot yourself, for all that pretty Gretchen stands there as the most disconsolate of wall-flowers; you know the air as well as I, and you might give me a chance. Come on, old fellow!"

The taciturn hunter, thus addressed, complied, if somewhat reluctantly, and then Hankins was up and away in the whirl with Gretchen.

Even apart from his having rescued her from an awkward solitariness, the German girl, herself fond of the pastime, was no less proud than grateful, for the handsome half-blood was not only the best violinist, but also the best dancer, on the frontier.

On went the music, and on went the dance!

One reel was wound off but for another to be taken up, with the briefest of intervals.

Wild Bill had scarcely begun to tune up for the next dance when there was an interruption of a serious kind.

Shots were heard from the men on guard, then the plunging halt of a horse just outside, and, as the door was again thrown open, old Enfield, scarcely recognizable from mud and rain, and with his wounded left arm hanging uselessly at his side, burst and staggered into the room.

"My girl, Patty," he hoarsely exclaimed, reeling unsteadily on his feet. "They've got her—Cortez and his gang—besides killing our escort. Look out for yourselves! There are others on my track—hark!" as the out-post shots were continued; "they are here even now." And fainting at last from loss of blood, he fell, half-senseless, at Wild Bill's feet.

Instant confusion ensued, the women stricken dumb with alarm, while the men sprang for their fighting tools.

Hankins had taken his opportunity to seize Lottie by the wrist—she had just been released by Towners, and was still in the first bewilderment of it all—and gently drew her apart from the others without being observed.

"I love you, love you, love you!" he whispered, with a strange, thrilling intensity of utterance. "Heavens! what I have suffered! Oh, my life, my life, cannot you prefer me to that jealous Towners? However, you shall see me die for you, if needs be."

Lottie had always rather feared than disliked the man.

Now she was taken completely by surprise.

Then the outside shots were multiplied, the excitement was at its height, and he sprang away to join the other defenders.

"Shut that door!" roared Buffalo Bill, himself busy assisting the women up the ladder leading to the sleeping lofts overhead, where they would be secure. "Why, don't some of you shut it?"

But it wouldn't be closed readily, notwithstanding that Stark was pulling and hauling at it.

Then there was a tremendous gust of the tempest, accompanied by the trampling of numerous steeds, and a shrill, malevolent voice yelled from without:

"Let 'em have it, curse 'em! Murder 'em all without mercy!"

Simultaneously a volley of shots was poured into the cabin, there was a hoarse, brutal laugh, a series of shouts and oaths, and a flash of lightning betrayed the presence of five or six of the Border Bandits riding wildly away into the darkness and the storm.

Almost at the same moment Sim Greaves staggered blindly into the house, the blood pouring from a gunshot gash in the neck, while the riderless broncho of Dan Tiemann, the other cowboy who had been on guard duty, true to his ranch training, came whirling up to the door, looking in appealingly with an all but human intelligence in his startled eyes.

At first, in the smoke and confusion, it was thought that the outlaws' volley had been without effect.

Then Frank Stark sprang, with an oath, to his wife's side, where she sat dumbly in the middle of the floor, holding in her arms little Edna, who was senseless from a bullet wound in one of her little arms.

All the other inmates had escaped the volley, and it was fortunately found that the child had not been fatally hurt.

"See what was the matter with that door!" commanded Buffalo Bill, while Greaves and old Enfield were being looked after.

"That was what was the matter," cried Bevins, holding

up a heavy improvised wedge of firewood that had been stuck underneath the door.

Wild Bill now turned upon Hankins with a stern, suspicious look.

"Hank, how could that have come there?" he demanded. "You're the only one that—judgin' by antecedents—could have done it."

"Me—I?" exclaimed the half-breed. "Good heavens! you then think me capable of—but hark! There come the main body of the gang to the attack. I'm for tackling 'em in the open this time, whether you fellows are with me or not." And he forthwith sprang out of doors, rifle in hand, as a fresh thunder of hoofs was heard approaching the house.

"He's right!" shouted Buffalo Bill, following his example. "Come on! the women can take care of what's left behind."

The pards were after him, shutting the door behind them, and then it was the turn of the outlaws to be surprised.

As some flashes of lightning revealed the whole gang of them, with Jack Corter himself at their head, the ranchmen—and none more industriously than Hankins, to all appearances—suddenly loosened out upon them such a swift and deadly succession of shots from their breech-loaders that they were altogether taken aback.

"Again and again, boys!" cried the clear, ringing voice of Cody. "We're under cover, and they're not."

This was true, the defenders having sprang into various positions of advantage round about the cabin, while every frequent flash of lightning revealed the hostile horsemen broadly in the open space.

Again and again the breech-loaders spoke out with frightful rapidity, emptying saddle after saddle, while the return shots from the exasperated freebooters were of no avail whatever.

At last the latter could no longer face the music, but began to break away in every direction.

"Never mind, Buffalo Bill," Corter's voice was heard to roar out, choking with rage. "Better luck for us next time. Henceforth it will be the Border Bandits who will hunt you men down to the bitter end."

Then there was nothing heard but the galloping hoof-beats of the baffled gang.

When the pards returned to the house, the first thing that Wild Bill did was to grasp Hankins by the hand.

"Perhaps I wronged ye with my suspicions, Hank," said he, simply. "If I did, I am sorry for it."

"Maybe we've all been wronging him, for that matter," interposed Buffalo Bill. "At all events, he's just stood by us shoulder to shoulder, and I saw with my own eyes that he didn't shoot for fun."

"I never do that, friends," replied the half-breed, quietly. "And as for your unjust suspicions, I suppose the only thing left me is to live 'em down and prove 'em wrong."

By this time—and the whole affair since the first intimation of the outlaws' presence had not lasted more than ten minutes—all the cattlemen employed on the combined ranches, about fifteen in all, had collected at the house. Fresh sentries were posted, and then, the storm continuing to subside, a general investigation as to results was made, outside and in.

Of those inside the cabin, Greaves was found to be

the worse wounded, though by no means mortally. Old Enfield was sufficiently recovered from his hurts to give an account of Patty's capture and the murder of the three cavalymen who had constituted his escort. And little Edna had only sustained a painful flesh wound in the arm, from which she was bearing up as bravely as could be expected under the loving ministrations of her mother.

An examination of the battle-ground, however, revealed a more tragic story.

CHAPTER VI.

YET ANOTHER SURPRISE.

In the first place, the dead body of poor Dan Tiemann on the bank of the swollen creek, his rifle still clutched firmly in his lifeless hand, a bullet-hole squarely between the eyes.

A few paces away lay the body of a Cheyenne brave, who had long been notorious as an associate of the outlaws, and whom the cowboy's last bullet had doubtless bored through the heart.

Then there were more slain outlaws—white and red—together with dead and dying horses, found scattered over the prairie as witness to the deadliness of the defenders' fire.

"It might have been better," discontentedly growled Wild Bill, after examining the slain without discovering among them a leading outlaw or one that had even been known to him.

"Yes, and it might have been a sight worse, too, pard," said Buffalo Bill. "True, it would have been more satisfactory to have found Colonel Jack himself, or Red Ralph here, instead of this small fry. But let us be thankful for the good luck that has stood by us as it is."

"Bill Anderson headed that advance gang that fired inter ther cabin," observed the Little Corporal. "It was his voice that called out to us, and I caught a glimpse er Anderson's hulking big form as he were hurrying away through the lightning gleams."

"So did I," said Cody. "But enough of this now. Let us carry in all that is left of poor Dan—Heaven rest him! a better cattleman never twirled a lariat or pulled a gun. And then we shall arrange for the pursuit as soon as this rain shall give us a show."

But the rain continued to descend in increased torrents, notwithstanding that the storm-wind which had accompanied it was now completely deadened, and the rushing sound of the swollen creek was as thunder to the ear.

"The villains can't make off to the westward or northward by a detour at all events," grumbled Buffalo Bill, on the way back to the house. "The streams are more than impassable, thank the Lord!"

The remains of poor Dan were left in one of the outbuildings, and then the search party re-entered the house.

The wounded had been left in charge of one Brisket, otherwise "the doctor," a ranchman, who had also been a capable army surgeon till drink, gambling, and other weakness had caused him to lose his position, and half-breed Hankins, who likewise possessed some knowledge of surgery among his other attainments, had been left behind as his assistant.

"Where's the child, doc?" inquired Buffalo Bill, after perceiving that Mr. Enfield and Sim Greaves had been made comfortable.

hour, when we shall start. The question that puzzles me is just this: Where can the Border Bandits have been sheltering themselves from the storm in order to have been enabled to make these several successive attacks, or sham attacks, upon us? It beats me out."

"It orn't to, Bill," spoke up Wild Bill, in his dry, close-lipped way. "There's the Rock Pines."

"Of course, and where else? Why didn't I think of it?"

"That's it," cried Frank Stark. "And now they're up an' away again in ther same direction for ther Missouri State line. It's as plain as ther nose on a Jew's face."

An hour later, the storm having partly cleared off, the expedition was in readiness to start.

Enfield had carried his point in joining it, and besides him, Buffalo Bill and the latter's four regular fighting pards, the party contained six picked men from among the cowboy employees, the remainder of whom were to be left behind as a home guard.

This made twelve men in all, splendidly mounted, armed to the teeth, and veteran plainsmen and Indian fighters every man of them.

True, the Border Bandits, in full force, would, perhaps, outnumber them more than four to one, even with the heavy losses they had recently sustained.

Brief were the partings and brief but earnest the Godspeeds, as the first stormy streaks of the new day signaled the departure.

"Fall in—march!" was the command, and the cavalcade began to move for the broad, open, rain-soaked prairie region.

"Wait!" called out Lillie Stark, who had gone with Kitty Bevins to one of the loft-rooms in the Cody cabin, in order to catch the lost parting glimpse of the expedition, and she waved something white from the little window. "A messenger!—some one is coming!"

"Where away?" shouted back Buffalo Bill, as he brought his men to a halt.

"There, off to the south! It looks like an Indian, and he is motioning to you with something."

Yes, they all saw the newcomer now, and in another minute he gravely reined in his galloping pony close at hand—a magnificent specimen of the young Indian brave, in full fighting costume, though, oddly enough, altogether devoid of the disfiguring war paint accompaniment, and having a white rag tied to the end of his long rifle.

"Look out, Gretchen!" Kitty banteringly called down to the girl, who was standing with Mrs. Cody and Brisket at the open doorway below, several of the home-guard cattlemen being grouped near by. "Sure, an' it's Three Arrows himself, that wild Injun admirer av yourself. Look out that you're not the nixt av us to be kidnapped."

The German girl had flushed, for, to tell the truth, she was less displeased than she would have it appear at having evoked the bold but reticent worship of the handsome Ogallalla brave.

Mistrust and suspicion had, however, fallen upon the horsemen at the Indian's approach.

"What do you want, Three Arrows?" demanded Buffalo Bill, sharply.

"I bear a message, Chief Bill," replied the warrior, in pretty fair English.

"A message? Why, I'll bet my rifle to a tin cup

you've only just quitted Corter and his blood-drinkers with whom I know of my own knowledge that you have been openly training and raiding for the past fortnight."

"The great white chief never spoke more truly," was the calm admission.

There was a general grasping of rifles and knitting of brows among the band of avengers, but their leader suppressed the demonstration with a gesture, though himself apparently mistrustful.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE ARROWS.

"Give ther buck a show," counseled Wild Bill, in a low voice. "You know what I've allers thought might be in his favor."

"All right," replied Cody, in the same tone; and then he addressed Three Arrows again, saying: "A message for me?"

"Yes."

"From Corter?"

"No."

"From whom, then?"

"From Allannah, the White Queen of the Ogallallas."

"Ha! but how can you have come direct from her?"

"My message is a long-standing one—to the effect that the white ranch-king's to trust always in me, Three Arrows, as her messenger and a secret friend as against the Border Bandits."

This was the substance of the young brave's words, which every one fairly understood, though they were spoken partly in the Sioux language.

"Humph!" growled Buffalo Bill, still more or less mystified. "And how are we to be sure of all this?"

"This will tell you." And Three Arrows produced and handed over an odd-shaped and folded package.

On being opened, however, it proved to be a communication in Indian picture-writing, very artistically executed in various colors on dressed birch-bark, as white as paper, and arranged in folding sections, after the manner of a pocket-map.

There were but three of the party—Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and Enfield—who could decipher this sort of thing, and they at once put their heads together over it.

"Shall we trust to Allannah in what she professes here?" asked Cody, at last.

"She's a devil's squaw, a dangerous witch, is my say," promptly responded the trader on his part.

"And your say?" Cody turned upon Wild Bill.

"Trust her!" was the latter's laconic reply.

Buffalo Bill hesitated, and then, folding up the writing, secured it upon his person, as a sign that he accepted and placed faith in it.

"All right, then, Three Arrows," said he. "Now, what is your counsel to us, as the White Queen's accredited agent?"

"You are starting on the girl-stealer's trail?" inquired Three Arrows.

"Of course."

"And were about taking an easterly course, with the Rock Pines as your first guide?"

"Yes."

"All wrong. The true trail is due westward, after rounding the creek-head, ten miles to the southward."

"Due westward? But all the other intervening tributaries of the Arkansas must be booming bank-full after this flooding rain."

"Not if you follow the Border Bandits' trail, to be there taken up, white chief."

"Where is the outlaw's destination?"

"Far away—the white chief will have to follow up their trail in order to find."

"Look here, I can't believe in all this stuff."

"That is as the white chief chooses. Allannah, the White Queen of the Sioux, has spoken through Three Arrows." And the messenger turned his horse's head.

"And, in the meantime, what do you propose to do?" cried Cody.

"To rejoin the flying women-stealers, though by a route that the white chief and his braves cannot follow—it is Allannah's wish," was the unmoved reply.

Cody glanced inquiringly at Wild Bill, and receiving an answering nod, as much as to say, "Let him go unhindered."

"Your counsel will be followed, Three Arrows," Buffalo Bill then said. "And you are free to depart."

The young chief simply bowed his haughty head, with its splendid crest or helmet of eagle-feathers, as he rode away, plunging his horse into the foaming creek.

They followed wonderingly, for it did not seem possible that boat, man, or brute could venture into that swirl and live a moment.

"This is Three Arrows' route," he called but once to the white hunters, who were reining back their frightened steeds upon the furious brink. "Is there fear among the paleface chiefs to follow him?"

With that he was the next instant fighting the waves and straining toward the further shore, amid a chaos of uprooted trees, swept along by the current.

A dozen times or more it seemed that horse and man must go down in the desperate and apparently forlorn struggle. But for all that, the goal was ultimately reached, and, with a last wave of the hand, the fearless brave spurred away out of sight through the opposite timber belt.

The word of command was again given, and, without another word, the avengers drew away under the slowly brightening skies upon the new route which had been indicated to and accepted by them.

Old Enfield, however, had retained his suspicions unabated, and was not backward in growling out his objections from time to time.

"There's no good in Allannah, or in any agent of hers, even admitting Three Arrows to be such, which I don't admit by a darned sight," was the burden of his reiterated complaints. "The woman is a fraud, a mockery, and a snare, and I have reason to know it. I don't believe he took this trail at all. We're bound to be led into an ambushade. You'll see. Don't talk to me."

"No one's talked to you yet, you've done all the growling on your own account, Dock," Buffalo Bill impatiently interrupted him at length. "We submitted to your coming along, with only your one good arm to bless yourself with. Let that content you. You can take passage, but you can't hold the lines over this team."

"I want to get back my daughter, that's all," snapped out the old trader.

"No more than we all want to get her back for you. And isn't Lottie in the same boat with your Patty?"

"Dock Enfield, hold yer jaw an' submit ter orders; 'r quit ther band," growlingly interposed Tomahawk Towners.

It was almost the only utterance which Towners had made since Lottie's abduction had come to light, which gave his present reproof additional weight; while his hard-set face and the smoldering fire in his eyes told of the fierce anguish and thirst for revenge that burned under his forced calmness.

When the head of the creek was reached, however, it really looked as if there might have been some grounds for his apprehensions.

The weather had cleared off, bracing and cool, and at this point a considerable body of mounted savages were perceived drawn up, on the farther side of the timberline that scattered out into the prairie bank of the creek source.

"Treachery, by Jupiter!" snarled Enfield, as the halt was made, getting ready to handle his rifle with his one hand. "What did I tell you?"

Buffalo Bill was sweeping the situation with his field-glass. "Humph! just as I thought—Cheyennes, and not Sioux. This ought to serve our turn in putting us upon Corter's distinct trail. Ready, all, for the word!"

It was given accordingly, after a brief breathing for the horses, whose powers had fortunately thus far not been taxed.

Then the frontiersmen charged with such fury, firing on the gallop with splendid precision, that the enemy, who did not greatly outnumber them, were at once scattered in headlong flight, leaving several of their number and ponies dead upon the plain.

The Cheyennes were now considered to have regularly declared war, which subsequently proved to be the fact.

While the scalps were being taken, one of the perishing reds was fortunately found weak-kneed enough to give the desired information with regard to the continued trail of the fugitive outlaws, and, with but a very brief interruption, the victorious frontiersmen pressed on.

Late in the afternoon there were signs in the freshening trail of an unmistakable gain being made upon the retreating band.

Then, shortly afterward, they suddenly came in view of a large Indian village or town, nestling in a sparsely-timbered depression of the great plain at the fork of two streams.

"We are not misinformed as to our trail," said Cody, as another halt was made and his field-glass was again put to use. "The great village of the White Queen of the Ogallalla Sioux is at our feet."

Old Enfield had knitted his bushy Scotch eyebrows ominously, and there was still enough doubt as to the temper of this branch of the great Sioux nation as to cause some uneasiness all round.

But presently Alannah herself, with a small escort of young braves in attendance, was seen coming out to meet them on her white horse.

One of those accompanying her was Three Arrows, towering a head and shoulders above his tall fellows, and, looking perfectly fresh, notwithstanding the hard ride he must have made of the cut-off after stemming the mad waters of Ruby Creek.

"Corter and his desperadoes passed by us before noon to-day," said Allannah, abruptly, in good English, and without waiting for a question to be addressed to her. "They wanted to pass through my camp, and bargain for a relay, but were refused permission. However, you cannot possibly overtake them to-night. They will be found at their western fastness. You did well to heed the instructions of Three Arrows, though Corter should not be permitted to suspect this. That is all. You can camp here in the vicinity, if you wish."

While speaking, she had addressed herself particularly to Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, ignoring all the others, with the single exception of the old sutler, upon whose scowling face she occasionally rested her melancholy eyes with a half-menacing gaze.

"Allannah, we thank you," said Buffalo Bill, simply. "But where is the western fastness of Corter and his crew?"

"You ask that question, without divining the answer, White King of the border men!" said Allannah. "But your great friend at your side there, Silent Sure-shot of the flowing locks," indicating Wild Bill, "might at least have guessed it."

"Painted Rock," hazarded Wild Bill, and Allannah gravely nodded.

"Ha! away off there?" exclaimed Cody. "Why, that's over the Territory line, and as wild a spot as any on the whole border."

Allannah was turning away, when he thought of mentioning the brush the party had had with the Cheyennes.

"That is nothing to us Ogallallas," replied the White Queen of the Sioux. "With both the Cheyennes and the Pawnees we Ogallallas and our allies, the Poncas, are on good terms—at present. If they choose to pick a quarrel with the white settlers, that is their own affair."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WHITE QUEEN'S CAMP.

"It ain't only with the settlers, woman," suddenly roared out old Enfield at this juncture; "but with the army authorities that they've picked their quarrel. They helped the Border Bandits murder my escort of three cavalymen last night, when my daughter was carried off from me. I'd have you understand that, too, devil's witch that you are."

Buffalo Bill was incensed at this undiplomatic outburst, but Allannah had only condescended to regard its author with a half-contemptuous elevation of her brows.

"A privileged friend of the white chief's, perhaps—the little old Coyote-Snap-at-Nothing, I suppose?" she queried of Cody, with such a languid indifference, half in Sioux and half in English, as to provoke a general and jeering laugh at the testy sutler's expense.

She was then again turning away when Enfield spurred after her before he could be restrained.

"Here, you bleached squaw," he cried, "you've not yet said whether Corter's crew took their captives along with 'em, or left 'em under your precious care. D'ye hear, Allannah? Now, I'm going to know the truth about my girl, Patty, at all events."

For an instant a wave of fury and scorn swept over

the mysterious face, while a cruel look that was not good to see fluttered upon the red lips.

Then she was cold and impassive as before, as with a slight sign she suppressed a hostile movement on the part of her wild followers.

"The Ranch King should take care of his little old Coyote-Snap-at-Nothing," she quietly observed, tapping her forehead. "He might find himself in trouble." And then she galloped back to the village with her red escort.

"Stop where you are!" thundered Buffalo Bill, as Enfield, half beside himself, was about spurring in pursuit. "You've done enough for one day—you hear me!"

The command was obeyed in silence, though unwillingly.

Then, as the afternoon was nigh spent, the party pressed on through the timber, and made their camp for the night a little west of the village.

An hour after dark, when the evening meal had been disposed of, Cody, accompanied by Wild Bill, approached on foot the Indian sentries nearest to their camp-fire, and sent in by one of them a request for an interview with the White Queen.

It was promptly granted, and they found themselves in the presence of Allannah, who was seated upon a couch of skins before her tepee, in the full glare of adjacent camp-fires. She was alone, as was her habit, in the somewhat mysterious state that she maintained with her people, though her guards and women were visibly within call.

Her tepee itself was superior in every way over all the others, with certain suggestions of a refined taste. A strange squaw was Allannah, the White Queen of the Sioux, if squaw she really were, which was doubted by not a few of the more observant whites who had been brought in contact with her. To her own people, however—the Ogallallas being at that time the most numerous and influential branch of the great Sioux tribe, or nation—she was little short of an inspired being, besides their universally acknowledged, half-idolized great medicine woman, for whom any one of her braves, young and old, would have laid down his life.

She had suddenly first appeared among them years before, in a night of appalling tempest, and from no one knew where, having a perfect knowledge of their language and traditions, declaring herself as commissioned by the Great Spirit to rule over them.

Their hereditary chief had shortly before been smitten dead by a lightning stroke, and it was in a halo blaze of an exceptionally fearful mountain storm that she had first appeared among them. She supported her claims to superiority with numerous wonderful cures among their sick and wounded, and by such wise and far-seeing counsels as led to frequent and unusual successes over their enemies, the Pawnees. And, above all, Allannah (it was the name she had given herself, as signifying the Rainbow Spirit) was versed in legerdemain, by the occasional practice of which she indubitably wove her spell of power.

It was, perhaps, more than enough. She had been made their White Queen, and was still such, successful, powerful, beloved, feared.

She looked at the scouts penetratingly with her clear, sad eyes, while motioning them to be seated on a rude,

low bench, which one of her attendants, at a sign, brought from the interior of the tepee.

"The post-trader, Enfield, told you to come to me," she said. "That for one thing. Then you wish to treat for means to transport your camping materials, for another. Therefore I have anticipated this visit from the White Ranch Chief and the great Silent Sure-shot, his friend. Am I right?"

"Yes, Allannah," replied Cody, in no little surprise, while Wild Bill also looked puzzled.

"Well, you have permission to treat with my under-chiefs for what you require. Now, as to the post-sutler's desire?—though, of course, I can divine it."

"We don't doubt that—and it is just this, Allannah," said Buffalo Bill. "Some allowances, we think, ought to be made for the old man's grief over the abduction of his daughter."

"Well?"

"He insists that the outlaws may have left the girl in your temporary care. And we've promised to put a question fair and square to you on his account."

"What!" she exclaimed; "and you two can imagine that of me? Why, you are at liberty to search my tepee for the girl or our whole camp for that matter, if you are so foolish as to believe such a thing. I hope you are satisfied."

There seemed to be no questioning the perfect naturalness with which this was said, and which, nevertheless, so cleverly evaded a direct response to the demand at issue.

"All right." And then both men went off through the village to bargain for a couple of pack animals and certain forgotten outfittings of which their expedition was likely to stand in need.

They were speedily successful, and the White Queen furtively watched them out of the village by the light of the fires, till the rise of ground finally shut them from view.

Then she sent out a command to her outposts, to the effect that no other approach was to be permitted from the neighboring camp.

After this, a summons brought Three Arrows to her side.

"The horses!" she commanded; "you know the rest that I require of you."

The young chief, silently vanishing, speedily returned, leading two splendid mustangs, picked animals, and one of which was provided with a woman's saddle.

There was hardly another chief in the tribe but was madly jealous of Three Arrows' apparent favor in their queen's eyes, and yet hardly one who did not feel that her heart must be marble to all—to him as much as to the rest.

Three Arrows having returned, Allannah signed to one of her women, who went into the tepee, quickly coming back accompanied by Patty Enfield, the Girl Rifle Shot.

The latter wore a confident look in her bright face, as if a good understanding might have already been come to between her and the White Queen.

At another sign from the latter, the attendants fell back, when she said to the young girl:

"You have slept and rested well, little Flower?"

For answer, Patty impulsively seized the other's hand and pressed it in a grateful way.

"And the Flower feels herself equal to following out the White Queen's instructions with the white devil Corter, and his demon crew—her trusty rifle in readiness in case of need?" continued Allannah, slowly.

Patty grasped her rifle, which she had in her hands, with a tightening grip, and smiled, as she replied:

"I understand what you require of me, Allannah, and shall carry out what I undertake. Have no fear of that."

"Everything is in readiness, then, and Three Arrows will accompany you. Farewell." And Allannah held out her hand.

As Patty once more pressed it, she regarded the White Queen with a longing and yet troubled look.

"Ah, if I could only know you better and more closely, Allannah," she exclaimed, in a low tone. "Something impels me to love you, and yet there is something in your strange eyes that both repels, and yet would seem to wish to draw me to you. Oh, if I only knew what it is that makes my father fear and hate you so, why, then——"

She paused, started, at the sudden fury that swept over the cold face, but it was gone as quickly as it came. And then Allannah abruptly released her hand and snatched the young girl to her breast in a straining embrace.

"Oh, child, child!" murmured the White Queen, brokenly; "if it might only be otherwise. If instead of being his child, my sworn enemy's—but this is madness. She thrust Patty almost rudely from her, and then sprang up, stern, pale as before. "Away," she continued, motioning toward the waiting horses. "Follow my instructions, and all will be well; disregard them, and you are lost. Three Arrows knows the rest."

Without another word, Ponca Patty sprang upon the horse that Three Arrows held in readiness for her, while the young chief leaped upon the other.

A strange look passed between him and the White Queen of the Sioux, as the latter impatiently waved her hand.

Then, with Three Arrows slightly in the lead, the pair rode off rapidly into the timber to the south of the village, and were gone.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTORS AND CAPTIVES.

Shortly before noon of that day, as Allannah had intimated, Corter and his crew made their halt in the vicinity of the great Ogallalla camp.

And during that halt their leader had temporarily resigned his own captive to the White Queen of the Sioux.

Patty, having been a prisoner much longer than Lottie, and having as a consequence been subjected to so many more hardships throughout the storm, was by that time in such miserable plight that Allannah would most likely have insisted upon having her left over with her, even if Corter had not proposed it, which he did. The girl had, therefore, been left behind, on Allannah's assurance that she should be forwarded under escort to Painted Rock. For the White Queen's simple word was known to be sacred all along the border, though, of course, Corter could have no notion of the secret instructions with which his little captive was to be returned to him.

As for half-breed Hankins' captive, no difficulty had been experienced with her.

She had, in fact, continued so thoroughly under the spell of her captor's hypnotic "suggestion" up to the time of the halt at the Ogallalla camps as even to impress Patty at first with the belief that she was the willing partner of the half-breed's flight. Allannah, however, had shrewdly suspected the truth, though she had been careful to keep her own counsel until after the outlaw's departure, when she had communicated her suspicions to the Girl Rifle Shot, while also unfolding her special instructions for the latter's action.

However, as the day wore away, so also did the spell wear off which held the half-breed's captive in her strange thralldom.

It was impossible for the outlaws, with their jaded steeds, to reach their chosen rendezvous that night, so that a halt was made at Elk Creek.

It was when the party were going into camp that the young woman turned suddenly upon her captor.

In her hand was a small cocked revolver, which she had unknown to him retained, and her entire act was expressive of resolution, courage, and self-possession, which had been gradually returning to her during the past few hours without his having been permitted to suspect the truth.

"Scoundrel of a half-breed," exclaimed Lottie; "I see it all now, how you have in some way spellbound me, in this foul scheme of yours to abduct me from my home. But you are yet to find to your cost that it is no helpless, ignorant girl, but a frontiersman's daughter, whom you have thus sought, coward that you are, to delude. You are at my mercy at this moment. A single hostile movement on your part, and a bullet from this weapon will reach your black heart."

To say that Hankins was surprised is putting it mildly. He comprehended but little of this occult gift or power that he was enabled to exert upon others at times, and had not dreamed that she was, with the assistance of the free air, the vigorous exercise and her robust constitution, silently throwing off his spell and becoming her brave, fearless, and collected self again. If not altogether an easy victory, he had at least looked forward to palliating his offense, and, perhaps, gradually ingratiating himself in her favor, in his own good time. Reckless and daring as he was, he turned pale, and hesitated.

"I have nothing to urge, nothing to plead."

"You are at my mercy!" she interrupted, indignantly. "Do you understand that? Answer, or I fire." Her firm finger was at the trigger, the leveled tube point-blank at his breast.

"Of course I do," with a politely submissive bow, for she had maligned him in her exasperation—he was no coward. "I simply await your commands."

"In the first place, then, as to your villainous associates here." She indicated with a gesture the main body of the outlaws—such of them as were not actively engaged in making the camp—who were standing apart, either curiously or sneeringly observing the pair. "Explain to them at once the sorcery by which you compelled me to accompany you—and see to it, too, that you leave nothing in doubt."

Hankins hesitated but an instant, and then did as she commanded.

Perhaps some of his auditors were too ignorant to altogether understand his exposition of his own conduct in the affair, but enough was said to effect a change in their attitude toward the young captive.

"Now," continued Lottie, in the same resolute tone, "have some sort of habitation made for my exclusive use while we remain here, for you have no tents or anything of the sort that I can see. As it is, I must accommodate myself to what there is. Do as I command."

He bestirred himself, and, with the assistance of several of his fellow outlaws, soon had a special little lodge of branches reared for her, with a plentiful supply of blankets for its interior, and even with a particular little camp-fire sparkling briskly before its entrance.

Lottie calmly installed herself therein, without troubling herself to thank any one for the accommodation thus afforded.

At the main camp-fire, where the outlaws were making their coffee and cooking a couple of fat antelopes which they had managed to bag at long range during the afternoon's ride, Hankins presently found himself in a fresh embarrassment as to who should be selected to carry some of the supper to his captive.

"Of course, I'd like to perform the service myself," he said. "But then," scratching his chin, "after what has happened that would hardly do."

"I should say not," cried big Bill Anderson, with his brutal laugh and customary oath. "Since your young miss is ter be waited on at last by ther hull gang of us, we'd better build a hotel fer her on the spot. However, select Red Rodmon yonder for ter tote in ther hash an' do ther agreeable, Hank. He's almost ez soft spoken ez you yourself on occasion, an' mebbe we kin scare up a boiled shirt outen some one of our kits, fer to fit him out 'ith a waiter's white apron an' a napkin. Har, har, har!"

"Reddy's altogether too dirty," replied Dandy Hankins, quietly. "Besides, his red head might set fire to the lodge."

"You go, Chipper," said the half-breed at last, indicating a smooth-faced young outlaw, with something frank and fresh in his devil-may-careishness, suggestive of a farmer's lad gone newly astray in the path of crime. "Were Three Arrows here I'd send him, but in his absence you will, perhaps, be less distasteful to the young lady than any of the rest of us." His brow momentarily darkened as he thus included himself with the others. "Besides, she would eat nothing at our noonday halt, and ought to be faint and hungry now."

"All right," replied Chipper Melton, the young man addressed. "I'm your man, then, Hank."

Some choice bits and a cup of coffee were accordingly sent in to the prisoner, and the tin dishes were presently returned empty, a sufficient indication of her having condescended to fortify herself with their contents.

"How did ther leetle critter act, Chipper?" called out Anderson, with his coarse, half-clownish guffaw. "Weepin' an' wailin', 'r still on her high hoss?"

"None er your business," gruffly responded the young man, whose air was still serious and thoughtful. "It's enough that she's among us, it seems ter me, 'thout bein' commented on by ther likes of you."

"Hey? what?" with an oath, and the outlaw was on his feet at a jump, his hand on the huge shooter in his belt. "This tork ter me, you unlicked cub?"

"Fair play an' a fair fight," cried several, dancing around the fire at the prospect of a tragedy. "Make a ring, though, an' let 'em have it out with knives."

"Behave yourself, Bill, or I'll make it my quarrel," interposed Hankins, also with his hand to his belt, and with a certain cool deadliness in the softness of his voice. "You hear me!"

Young Melton was merely regarding his huge foe with a disdainful look.

"Sit down ag'in, Bill," now commanded the master outlaw. "You're allers interferin' 'ith other men's business."

Anderson mutteringly complied, but with a lingering danger-signal in his fierce eyes, and what might have been a bloody dispute was thus averted, for the time being at least.

"Torkin' er Three Arrows," observed Colonel Corter, after a pause, "he orter hev showed up ag'in among us long afore this, I should say. Cuss his Injun heart, 'f I thort he might play us a trick some day, along er thet White Queen er his Ogallalla tribe, I'd shoot him down onexpected-like, so's ter make a sure thing er his good faith."

"You'd be safer shooting him in ther back, then, colonel," said Red Rodmon. "It'll be a wide-awake rustler, an' up airly in ther mornin' ter boot, thet'll down Three Arrows in a face-ter-face scrimmage."

"A back-shot's ez good ez any," jeered the chief. "Some even prefer ter give 'em in thet way."

"Three Arrows has like enough stopped over at the Ogallalla camp," said Hankins. "In that case, he might chance along between now and morning with your little Patty, colonel."

"Too good luck, thet, I'm afraid," growled the leader. "I don't know but what I was a durned fool to leave ther gal thar 'ith Allannah, arter all."

"But Three Arrows orter hev rejoined us without any delay," he continued. "Curse it all! how else air we ter know er what's been doin' at Ruby, erlong 'ith Buffalo Bill an' his gang? By—the powers!" with a blackening brow; "f I thort fer a minute thet Three Arrows was himself in love 'ith ther Girl Rifle Shot—"

"Oh, make yourself easy on that score, colonel!" said the half-breed, consolingly. "If our Ogallalla buck had lost his heart at all, it is not to Little Patty, but to Gretchen, the pretty German girl at the Cody Ranch."

The outlaws, having posted their sentries, remained for a long time talking together around their camp-fire, their voices sounding sometimes audibly, sometimes less distinctly, to Lottie, cringing among her blankets, and yet not daring to go to sleep in the solitude and silence of her little hut. Finally, as the voices grew louder and more quarrelsome, she peeped out toward the great camp-fire, and saw something which increased her alarm.

In spite of remonstrances on the part of Hankins, Corter himself, young Melton, and one or two others, the outlaws had managed to put several bottles of whisky in circulation.

There were songs, disputes, then a fight or two in consequence.

She shuddered, shrinking to the farthest corner of her retreat, holding the revolver in readiness, her heart beat-

ing fast with terrors never known before, and all the more frightful for their vagueness.

Then a silence fell, little by little, among the band, and she once more peeped out.

CHAPTER XI.

LOTTIE'S PERIL.

Most of the outlaws had fallen asleep in their blankets around the fire, but the young woman thought she still heard angry voices off in the timber belt, though she was not sure.

It seemed to her that Hankins was not among those stretched around the fire, and this rather increased than allayed her uneasiness. For, somehow, notwithstanding the trick he had played her, the half-breed's gentle respectfulness had not been exerted in vain, and she could not but have felt a comparative sense of protection in his proximity and watchfulness when amid that wild and lawless crew.

She might also have felt some relief in the presence of the young outlaw, Melton, whose sympathy while serving her with the food had somewhat impressed her in his favor, but neither could she be sure that his reclining figure was among the others.

At last she once more retired to her dark corner, and, making herself as comfortable as might be among the blankets, remained there propped up in the darkness, revolver still in hand, with the determination to watch out the night.

She remained for a long time watching the dying embers of her own little fire through the leafy entrance.

Then the soothing silence of the great solitudes, together with the grateful warmth of the blankets, was too much for her resolution, and even before she knew it she was fast asleep.

What was it—a stealthy step, or a cautious hand, fumbling to improvise an entrance at one side of her branch-built hut?

Lottie started to rise, still with but half-collected thoughts, and conscious that she must have slept several hours, though the darkness remained intense.

Then the revolver was suddenly snatched out of her hand.

And at this instant the dimly outlined entrance was darkened by an in-springing human form.

"Courage, miss!" exclaimed the half-breed's voice. "I am here!" and the intruder, Bill Anderson, was sent reeling by a tremendous blow between the eyes.

He rallied, however, and then the two were locked in a hand-to-hand grapple, while there were also sounds of contention without, and a voice, which Lottie recognized as Chipper Melton's, was heard to shout out:

"Cowards! but you'll find your game blocked."

Then she rushed into the open air, but with her trembling limbs refusing to carry her farther, and only to perceive the entire gang apparently hastening upon the scene, taking this side or that, while ringing shots began to mingle with the oaths and cries.

Corter's harsh voice was also heard calling out, in an effort to quell the disturbance.

Some one had thrown an armful of pine branches on the dying camp-fire, which now flared up brightly, throwing its lurid glare over the wild scene.

It had lasted but a minute or two, when the robber sentries came dashing in to take part in the melee.

Here two mounted figures came bursting in upon the scene out of the wide-surrounding darkness, there was a succession of shots that seemed to distract the desperadoes from the dispute directly in hand, and a deep, brave, girlish voice shouted:

"Villains! we are here in time, then, thank the Lord! Cheer up, Miss Lottie!"

Patty's voice—the voice of the Girl Rifle Shot to the rescue!

When they had been captives together Lottie had but vaguely noticed her, immersed as she had been in the sleep-waking, hypnotic spell, but now—

A semi-swoon came over her.

When she came out of it, a few minutes later, the brave girl's supporting arm was thrown protectingly around her, the fight was at an end, and she began to realize what had happened.

Ponca Patty and Three Arrows had come, and this diversion, combined with renewed efforts on the part of the outlaw chief, had finally quelled the riot.

The majority of the late contestants were gathered around the fire, nursing their bruises and wounds, though there had been no one killed or even desperately injured.

Hankins and young Melton passed Lottie without even looking at her on their way from the hut to the fire; the latter nursing a wounded arm, the half-breed with a streak of red down his dark face from a bullet-furrow along his left temple.

She started impulsively toward them in her womanly sympathy, but Patty restrained her.

"They are not badly hurt," said the latter, soothingly. "And see, Corter is already getting the villains under discipline again. Trust in me, Miss Lottie, and all will be well. Allannah divined the truth as to Hankins' mysterious power, and instructed me. Compose yourself now, and abide the result."

Corter was also looking intensely pleased at the return of Patty from the White Queen's protection, which he had scarcely dared to hope for.

"Here, you, Three Arrows!" he cried, "why didn't you foller straight on after ther band, as I ordered?"

"Our White Queen ordered me to halt over at our village, Big Chief Colonel Jack," calmly replied the young warrior, who had dismounted by the fire, along with the others. "You had left the Girl Rifle Shot there already."

"But what did you learn at Ruby?"

Three Arrows briefly related his experiences there, together with the fact of Buffalo Bill and his avengers having stopped over near the Ogallalla village for the night.

"Ha!" exclaimed the bandit chief; "then we've still got a long start of 'em. And even Buffalo Bill can have no idea of the large force of Cheyennes that will intercept him, probably at this very point." And then, with a glance around, he shouted: "Break camp, an' saddle up! The day is already breaking, and we must be at Painted Rock before noon."

The desperadoes seemed to have forgotten their bloody differences, or willing to bury the hatchet for the time being, at least, in bustling preparations.

Suddenly Patty gave a glad little cry.

"Ah, my Purplette!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands together. "Come here, Purplette, come here!"

Her trained mare, which Corter had insisted on taking away with the band on leaving Patty with Allannah, knowing the girl's affection for the faithful animal, broke away from the herd, and came toward her little mistress.

In a few minutes all was in readiness, and the outlaws were once more on their Western trail, under the light of the slowly fading stars and the first faint streakings of the new day.

A good horse, with a suitable saddle, had been provided for Lottie; she had thought it best to proceed with her captors without offering useless resistance, and at one side of her rode Hankins, at the other Chipper Melton.

Directly before them rode Colonel Jack Corter, vastly pleased, at the side of Patty Enfield, while Three Arrows was watchfully near at hand.

"It war reel good of ye ter keep yer word there way ye did, Patty," said Corter, with a grin.

"You hardly expected it, I suppose?" replied Patty, smilingly twirling her light rifle—she had been permitted to retain it.

"Wall, no, I kin hardly say I did," was the frank response.

"Well, neither did I. It was altogether Allannah's doing—though even she has no particular kindness for you, as you ought to know, Colonel Jack. So you needn't plume yourself with the thought that I'm back again, with you and your mean, hempen-collared crew—you'll every one of you come to it yet, mark my word!—through any regard I have for you."

Colonel Jack made a grimace—he was really a more than well-favored man, with his flowing beard, regular features, and soldierly bearing, apart from his generally desperado look.

"Oh, that'll come arter a while, Patty," he said, airily. "Fer I'm goin' ter be reel good ter ye, an' arter we're married an' settled down somewheres—say, away off from hyar, ye know, in—in Australy, 'r Chiny, 'r, better still, in some bang-up little Eden-island er there far South seas, whar ther—"

Patty, who had begun by being disgusted, interrupted him with a ringing, derisive laugh.

"Poetry isn't in your line, Colonel Jack. Better leave it to Dandy Hankins, back yonder, who'd be more at home in it, were he so inclined," with a glance behind her. "But look here, Colonel Jack. You remember how you used to make up to me at the agency, a year ago, when few, if any one, suspected you of being the thieving and murdering hound that you are?"

"Y-e-e-s," he replied. "Remember it, I should say so!"

"Well, if I hadn't exactly come to thinking you not a half bad fellow then—or sort of endurable, with no better man around, we will say—I certainly never thought you the dough-headed fool that you've recently proved yourself to be!"

Colonel Jack had been half expecting a compliment.

"What did ye come back to us fer, then?" he growled.

"Just wait till you find out, Mr. Corter," answered the young girl. "But if you think that your killing those three troopers in order to get hold of me—my old dad made his escape, I'm sure of that, is not going to be

bunted for—well just wait till you find out, as I said before."

"You may find out suthin' unexpected, too, me leetle boy!" snapped out Corter. And then, if discomfited himself, he at least left her something to ponder over as he abruptly spurred away from her side and joined the Cheyenne scouts and others at the head of his cavalcade. As for Patty, she quietly fell back to a position alongside of Lottie, whose captor-guardians offered no other objection than to look even graver and closer-lipped than ever.

An hour or two after sunrise, at the crossing of a small creek, a band of Indians was seen approaching. "Good enough!" shouted the outlaw leader, exultantly. "They're our friends—Cheyenne bucks in full paint, by Jingo! For'ard ter meet 'em, boys!"

CHAPTER XII.

PATTY AND LOTTIE TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER.

The new-comers were not only in full fighting trim, savagely enthusiastic from their tribe having openly taken the warpath against the white settlers and government troops.

Several of them had fresh reeking scalps dangling at their girdles. During the brief interview that ensued between them and the outlaws they dashed hither and thither on their ponies, giving utterances to savage yells, and eyeing the captive maidens.

The meeting was speedily over, however, and then the Indians galloped off by the trail the outlaws had come, while the latter continued their course.

"There they go!" cried Corter, rejoining Patty in high glee. "They'll jine ther bigger band er Cheyennes at Elk Creek, like enough, jist in time ter chaw up Buffalo Bill an' his dandy leetle gang. I wouldn't be in one er them feller's shoes fer ther best homestead in Uncle Sam's gift an' er belt full er gold, inter ther bargain."

Then Corter again rode to the front, grumbling and sighing under his breath.

"Miss Lottie!" the Girl Rifle Shot presently said, when she thought she could exchange a few words with her fellow-captive unobserved.

"Yes, Patty."

"I hope they will let us remain together when we reach our destination."

"So do I."

Here they paused, seeing that they were being watched by Hankins and Melton.

The conversation thence quickly became guarded, and consequently more confidential.

"How do you account, Miss Lottie, for Dandy Hankins treating you so considerately?" asked the younger

Lottie then related the details of her capture, so far as she knew them, and what had followed, after which she added:

"Hankins has not once, however, been less respectful to me than now, though before my coming so unexpectedly out of my sleep, as I suppose I must call it, he may have been somewhat more self-assured."

"The villain!" exclaimed Patty, with more indignation than she had yet displayed.

"Still," said Lottie, "confess, Patty, that you at first,

together with the rest, thought me to be running off with the half-breed of my own volition."

"I acknowledge it, my dear," replied the other frankly. "Of course, though, there was something in your movements and bearing that I could not understand."

"The fight over me back there at Elk Creek enlightened you to the contrary, I suppose?" continued Lottie.

"Oh, no; I knew better before that. Allannah had told me."

"Allannah!" in surprise. "How could she have known?"

"Better ask me what there is that Allannah doesn't or can't know, my dear—I suppose she saw how it was with you at a glance—one of her glances, you know. However, I am quite sure, if she had thought you to be in much real danger she would have likewise insisted on your being left behind to keep me company. But a strange creature is the White Queen of the Sioux."

"I should say so. Isn't there some old secret between your father and her?"

"Yes; or I've always been told so, though no one ever seemed to know what it was. But then she seemed to take a strange sort of interest in me." And Patty went on to tell of the visit of Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill to the White Queen's tepee in the Ogallalla camp.

Here Hankins rode up a little closer, to say, in a low tone, and without so much as looking at either of them:

"Better not talk too much together. The bully is noticing, and he doesn't seem to feel good over it."

They thanked him as he again drew off to one side.

"What an odd sort of an abductor!" observed Patty, and from this time on the captives were more guarded in their talk. "I would more than willingly—if it had to be by some villain or other, you know—have exchanged my Colonel Jack, as you were good enough to allude to him, my dear, for your respectful and mysterious half-breed. I really can't make him out."

"I think I can," was Lottie's reply. "A sort of gentle outlaw by nature, he hopes to win my esteem by his kindness. Buffalo Bill never forgives—no more does Tom Towner, and this man's reckoning shall be just the same."

"By the way, Patty, have you remarked how Chipper Melton, I believe they call him, watches you?"

"That beardless young robber! And what a name, too—Chipper!"

"There is something so frank and generous in his very recklessness of air that one can hardly suppose him to have been long with this desperate crew."

"Ah, never trust in looks, Miss Lottie. Besides, how is it he is with them, if not through inclination and natural bred-in-the-bone wickedness?"

"Well, there may have been circumstances—however, let that go. His generous bravery in standing by me I shall never forget."

"Was he really so brave and good, too?" said Patty, suddenly more interested. "Do tell me all about it, Miss Lottie!"

"But I can't remember much, everything was so confused and horrible. There is one thing, though, I can't understand about yourself, Patty."

"What is that, my dear?"

"You retain your gun, and seem to be under hardly any real restraint whatever."

"And you wonder that I don't make a break for it, along with Three Arrows, perhaps you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, I couldn't think of leaving you, for one thing, my dear."

"That is good of you Patty," said the other, her looks expressing even more gratitude than her words.

"That is just nothing, my dear." And then Patty drew closer, in order to say earnestly, while seeming to have her thoughts, like her eyes, almost anywhere else, "I'm on parole, you know. Not especially to that brute, Colonel Jack, but to Allannah. Wait till we get in camp at Painted Rock. Then wait for the word from me, or for some sort of a sign, in the event of our being separated. For, of course, you can shoot, too, given the occasion?"

"Certainly, though nothing like so well as you."

"Oh, that goes without the saying. Mighty few of 'em can."

"But if you are under parole to the White Queen not to escape?"

"Hush! we must not talk any more. Three Arrows will give me the word when the time comes."

Patty then turned to meet Corter, who was galloping back from the front, where a stream, turbulent from the recent rains, was about to be forded.

"Hyar we bel!" he shouted. "Painted Rock at last! An' look hyar, Miss Patty, 'pears ter me ye've chinned long ernough, an' more'n ernough, along 'ith thet gal. Ye hear me!"

"Oh, no, not in that whisper; you ought to yell a little louder, Colonel Jack," was the Girl Rifle Shot's sarcastic rejoinder. "And as for the rest, I shall continue to talk to my friend, Miss Lottie, when, where, and as long as I choose. You hear me!" with an exasperating mimicry of his blustering voice and manner.

"We'll see 'bout thet."

"Run on ahead again, Colonel Jack, or some of your pet lambs might get drowned—drowned is probably what you would call it. But then it isn't your fault; you couldn't help being a fool, try as you might."

The outlaw leader ground his teeth, and spurred off again, with a forced laugh.

On a precipitous cape of land, directly opposite, at the junction of two foaming streams, there rose out of a picturesque jumble of trees a vast rocky mass of grayish hue, whose smooth side was covered with rude figures and pictures in red and blue, weather-beaten, but indelible, outline.

It was Painted Rock, one of the wonders of that frontier, and the fastness of the Border Bandits was scattered in a series of rude cabins round about its thick-timbered base.

The intervening stream was speedily forded, though not without danger.

"Hyar, you two aren't ter mess tergether!" angrily exclaimed Corter, personally interfering when Lottie and Patty were about taking possession of one of the best huts, under the direction of Hankins and Melton. "I told yer that before."

"I'm still under parole, I believe, both to the White Queen of the Sioux and to you?" retorted Patty, angrily. "Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I suppose so," sullenly.

"Suppose so? you know it. And now look herkly onel Jack, Miss Lottie and I are to remain together because Allannah particularly desired it. If you dost it I give you back my parole on the spot. And th would risk calling down on your head the displeanch Allannah and her entire Ogallalla people, I refer as Three Arrows yonder."

"What has Three Arrows, or any one else b th self, got ter do with it?" roared Corter, with an buf

Three Arrows, in his dignified way, said: n't
"The Fair Flower speaks the truth, Big Chiere
Such is the will of the White Queen."

The bandit chief seemed to have his breath t t taken away for the moment.

"Cuss your copper-colored hide! cuss all of ye mu a glare all around; 'am I ther boss er this hyar ganu this hyar camp, am I not?"

"Retain your control, Colonel Jack," said Pattyrc calmness. "No decent man would dispute it with! t

"The other un's your captive," exclaimed C a wheeling upon Hankins in his fury. "What youfev ter do 'ith her?"

"That's my business, not yours, Colonel CorteA plied the half-breed, with one of his dangerous: h
"Now, take a look inside, if you please," he addedou ing politely to the captives. "Here is Chipper wile saddles and blankets; and we'll have a nice little fire for your benefit in less than no time."

Corter's face slowly blackened, but he abstained; further profanity, and turned upon his heel, aft c stowing a venomous look upon all.

A little later on, when dinner was cooking and se p had been posted, a single Indian galloped up to till posite shore, and waved his hand.

"It's a messenger from our friends, the Cheyed cried the bandit chief.

The Indian appeared to be desperately woundeth he, nevertheless, promptly put his jaded pony to s— ming the flood, without waiting or caring to fin A regular fording place.

As a consequence the animal was drowned, buf before its rider had been dragged to shore.

Corter alone bent over him to receive the merc directly after delivering himself of which the Indian? back and expired of a deep gunshot wound in the be

It was only by inference that the others could a the purport of the message, as Corter, very pale, t V to them, and said:

"Men, we must lose no time in getting ready fere worst. We've got a big fight right on hand, and them as knows their business."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AVENGER'S TRACK.

Buffalo Bill and his little band were breaking car daybreak; following their sojourn in the vicinity of great Ogallalla village, when Allannah, the V Queen, was seen riding out toward them and attend her young warriors in their best war attire.

"Something's happened!" said Wild Bill, after a glance at the approaching troupe. "Three Arrows a longer with the escort."

ue," observed Cody. "But we mustn't forget that I fully acknowledged being on his way back to join when he separated from us at Ruby."

still no one anticipated the full purport of the that Allannah was about to make.

Each King Bill, I am not unfriendly to you and as you ought to know," she said, when coming to

"There is, therefore, news for you."

at the White Queen of the Ogallallas speak," replied Buffalo Bill, courteously. "We shall be grateful."

on't be too sure of that. The entire Cheyenne are at last openly on the warpath."

much the worse for them, Allannah."

at they are, doubtless, all friendly to the White Chief and his crew."

much the better—for one side or the other."

hundred or more Cheyennes will most likely inter-
ou to-day, at one or another of the intervening
crossings."

al this is worth knowing. But forewarned, fore-
and thanks to you, Allannah."

few hours after your visit to my tepee, with the
silent Sure-shot last evening my young brave,
Arrows, rode away to rejoin the Border Bandits."

we have guessed as much, not seeing him here now
ou, Allannah."

he who had been briefly my guest accompanied

indeed!"

is; the fair little Prairie Flower, Ponca Patty, or,
call her, the Girl Rifle Shot."

then Allannah smiled, for her announcement was
et productive of startling effect.

hallo!" cried Cody, while Wild Bill and some others
d up with new interest. "But didn't you assure us
ild Bill here and me—that Patty was not in your
?"

nothing of the sort, as you will recollect by thinking
st—at least, nothing directly of the sort."

nd Allannah was explaining the circumstances under
the girl had been left in her charge, and had been
uff under Three Arrows' escort, when she was fur-

interrupted by old Enfield:

escrincess! witch! lying, false-hearted, bleached
n!" he roared, spurring toward her, with his
bied fist lifted, regardless of warnings from the res-

and escort alike; "was I not right in mistrusting
t! What! and you have dared——"

e, with a swift movement, she smote his horse in
erce with her riding whip, causing the animal to re-

violently as almost to unhorse its rider.

tle Old Coyote Snap at Nothing!" she exclaimed;

ou it was for love or fear of such as you that I
nded the fair little Agency Flower? Fool! had

ot been her child as well as yours my dagger and
y kindness would have searched the heart in her

bosom, and stilled its beat forever!"

then she was off on her return gallop, with her
Or escort around her.

At the surprise of every one the fury of the old sutler
uddenly subsided.

haps I may have wronged the woman," he said,
sle, and as if thinking aloud. "But then, smart as

ah is, she doesn't know everything."

"Trot out!" was the impatient command, and the
Rough Riding Rescuers were once more fairly on the
trail.

Whether by a change wrought in his hard nature by
Allannah's words or not, the theretofore close-lipped
Enfield was about to surprise his associates yet further.

Somewhat encouraged to the question by what had
happened, Buffalo Bill said to him:

"What is this long mystery between you and the
strange White Queen of the Sioux, anyway, Enfield?
Why not give us an inkling of it first as last?"

"Humph! why not?" was the trader's unexpected re-
sponse, after a moment's silence, and with a far-away
look in his hard gray eyes. "All right, then. Any of
ye chance to remember the case of the two young women
an' one man that alone escaped the Injun massacre of
the big emigrant train 'way up on the Platte River, be-
tween seventeen and eighteen years ago?"

"I remember hearing of it from my father at the time,"
promptly replied Cody, "though I can't recall to mind
the names and details."

Others of the party likewise recalled the affair, and
all were instantly more or less interested.

"Names and details aren't needed," continued the
trader, in the same mechanical, half surly tone. "I was
the man. The younger of the two young women was
my wife. The other was her sister, whom I had—er—
sort of jilted, as I suppose you'd call it nowadays, in
order to marry the younger. Any way, she hated me
like pizen, though she had hitched at 'bout the same time
I had, mebber out of spite, ye know. But then women
is peculiar—some of 'em, at least. Both o' these were.
However, her man had been massacred along 'ith the
rest, afore the troopers put in their saving appearance.
Fer, as I have said, we three were the only survivors."

The interest increased as he made a slight pause, the
horses being slowed down to a walk, that not a word
might be lost.

"Both ladies were in er delicate way, as ye might say,"
continued Enfield. "In fact, they was nigh on to expirin'
at the nearest fort, where we found shelter an' kind-
ness, along 'ith a post-surgeon to do the needful. Some
said as how I was sorter neglectful—sulky an' broodin'-
like—carin' more arter t'other un than my own, now
that things were changed about an' fixed diff'rent fr'm
the 'riginal intention—see? Mebbe I was, an' mebber I
wasn't. Leastwise, I'd got the tomahawk-swipe that
had left this scar down the back er my skull an' neck
what most of ye have like enough noticed, an' was some-
times a leetle mixed up in the brain-box. However, it
on'y made her hate me wuss'n ever. If she had been
pizeny afore she was just blizzardly later on, with a house
afire throwed in. A month later on there were four of
us at the fort cabin 'stead of three. One was a live little
gal baby. If another un had lived thar'd have been five
of us. The live baby was supposed to be mine. A
week later thar was yet ag'in on'y three of us, my wife
havin' died. Of my neglect, some of 'em said. She was
wild over it. Got up in the middle of the night, cussed
me high an' low, an' then wandered off inter ther wil-
derness, never to be seen ag'in. Sorter that way, at
least. Gentlemen," here the narrator sullenly wiped his
brow, and seemed to regret his revelation, "that's all.

The gal baby growed up to be the young woman you all know as Patty Enfield, the Girl Rifle Shot."

"But the mad young woman—the one that wandered away? never seen or heard of again, you say?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"On'y sorter that way, I said," growled Enfield. "Ye've all seen an' heerd of Allannah, the White Queen of the Sioux, as a matter of course?"

"Yes, yes."

"Wall, she's like enough to that young woman to have been her twin sister; an' ye may have obsarved that Allannah an' me don't seem to get along very sweet together."

Such was the revelation, and the old trader after making it was once more the same surly and non-committal old man.

The trail left by the fugitive outlaws was a plain one, and it was followed from the very start with the utmost vigor and dispatch.

CHAPTER XIV.

ELK CREEK.

Toward noon, with the timbered line of Elk Creek dimly in sight along the horizon, Tomahawk Towners and Flashshot Frank, who had scouted on ahead, came galloping back.

"Ther creek-crossin' is jest alive 'ith redskins!" exclaimed the last named. "Thar's so many of 'em thet ther timber can't hold all ther ponies they've tried ter hide away in it."

Wild Bill, in reining up for an observation with the others, gave utterance to one of those deep chuckles so habitual with reticent, self-contained men when unexpectedly pleased with a previously dubious outlook.

"Eh, then?" queried Cody, turning to him with a sharp look.

"Let me have that glass, Bill?" said Wild Bill, extending his hand. On the glass being passed to him the chuckle was repeated as he swept the crooked and ragged timber line with its powerful focus, adding, slowly, "Just as I thought, by Jingo! An' the Cheyennes don't often make such fools of themselves, either. But prob'ly they've got Big Thunder, War Dog, or one of their conceited younger bucks in command."

"But what is it, old fellow?"

"You see the crossin' where they've taken up their position?"

"Of course."

"An' then you see the thicker an' higher timber-clump overlookin' 'em fr'm a quarter of a mile further up, where the line elbows back this way?"

"Certainly."

"Bill," passing back the glass and at the same time gripping the hand outstretched to receive it, "we've got 'em dead! That's the best fording place of the two, though the least well known. An' then, as ye see—"

"I understand!" interrupted Buffalo Bill, exultantly. And then, at the fresh shouted command, "Forward! trot!" the entire little band swept straight on, directly toward the Indians' position.

The latter seemed puzzled at first, as if not comprehending how such a small force could be seriously con-

templating so foolhardy a thing as a front-face charge upon at least six times their number, securely ambushed into the bargain.

Then within less than long range of the ambush the Rescuers veered off to the southward, at the word of command, and broke in a headlong gallop for a superior counter position already alluded to.

The Indians saw their mistake when too late to remedy it. A number of them, indeed, lost no time in springing upon their ponies, and dashing off in the same direction along the wooded creek-line.

But the Rescuers were there before them, spurring for cover, then dismounting, and the next instant throwing four volleys from their deadly breech-loaders sent a great many was left of the Indian contingent whirling back upon their main body.

"Hurrah!" shouted Buffalo Bill. "That's the d' music! I think I can make out War Dog himself under at the timber-edge on that calico pony. Eh, Bill?"

Wild Bill nodded an affirmative.

In a few moments the hunters were regularly at work making the enemy's inferior position particularly hot for him by keeping up a three-hundred-yards range fire from the skirt of their elevated clump, their animals being well out of danger, though near at hand.

The savages—at least a hundred in number—returned the fire as best they could, but altogether without effect, by reason of the inferiority of their rifles, while the bullets and arrows with which the majority of them were armed were of no service to them whatever at such long-range work. Then their more exposed position amid the lower-down and thinner timber placed them at a further disadvantage, one or two of their number being picked off every few minutes.

The frontiersmen, on the contrary, were taking the leisurely and feeling particularly good, with perhaps a single exception of Towners, who was loading up for firing in a mechanical way, like a man half asleep.

"What's the matter with yer, Tom?" called out the elbow neighbor, the Little Corporal, at last. "D'y'e yer drum-corps an' a brass band ter wake ye up, 'r he forgotten what scalp-takin' means?" And some of them were also disposed to joke at the slow, rough fellow's expense.

"Nope," was the composed reply, "on'y I ain't much on side-shows er this hyar sort ez I be on the main event. An' then," here he timed his shot with opportunity, and caused a far-away crouching buck to leap into the air with a hole in his skull, "ez fer scalp-takin', it's a half-blood un I'm lookin' fer more'n to ez air held down by warpaint."

"Let up on that, you fellows!" ordered Buffalo Bill, turning his head. "Tom Towners'll be all right by the time comes."

This sort of fighting was kept up for several hours at the end of which the enemy, after withdrawing far down the creek, ceased firing altogether, while it was uncertain whether they were prepared to make a charge over the open or not.

"We must make sure of this," said Buffalo Bill, leading his rifle against a tree and beginning to lighten his load of some of its heavier weapons. "I'm going down to see. Cast Buckskin free, some of you, so as he can come at my call if need be."

ld Bill stepped back among the animals to do as
sted, Cody following while completing his prepa-
s.

"What's that?" asked the former, kicking with his
one of the several kegs or small casks which had
unloaded from the two pack-mules that had been
hed at Allannah's Ogallalla camp.

"Is one of the water-casks we got from the bucks,"
d Cody, indifferently.

"Not much, look hyar!" and, having freed Buckskin,
Bill had the keg in his strong grip, examining it
ively. "By Jupiter, it's a keg of gunpowder, which
must have traded off to us by mistake. Durned
ge that the difference in the heft of it didn't strike
if us at the time. Look for yourself!"

"It is," said the other. "Well, so much the better,
h we're in no particular need of loose ammunition.
I'm off, Bill."

vertheless, the great Silent Sureshot, as Allannah
called him, carefully set the odd keg to one side,
dodded complacently toward it, while following his
r out to the clump-edge.

ffalo Bill at once threw himself down flat and began
awl rapidly over the rough open space toward the
y's new position.

space was covered with sage bushes, loose stones,
low clumps of prickly-pear, and cut through here
here by shallow ravines.

ter arriving about midway down, the master-scout
lightly raising himself in order to get a better view
nd, when a dozen or more mounted warriors, with
Dog himself at their head, started out of the ravine
ther side and cutting off his retreat, spurred down
him with brandished tomahawks and appalling

hey could only have effected their concealment by
ising the utmost precautions, besides making their
es lie down flat in the shallow gullies, and now
thing connected with their appearance was a com-
and stunning surprise.

"Don't kill the white chief!" shouted War Dog, a
ddid looking young chief, superbly mounted, and
an eagle-feather head-dress reaching far down his
in the Cheyenne dialect. "It is the great White
h King! Take him alive for torture!"

it Buffalo Bill had already recovered from his mo-
ary surprise, and taken his measures accordingly.

instead of attempting to retrace his course, as was
otless expected of him, he waved his arms as a sig-
to his little command, and then broke away at a run
ght down the slope, at the same time sounding a
l, peculiar call on a whistle which he placed to his

answer to his signal the pards promptly poured
a volley upon the would-be interceptors.

almost at the same instant the daring Cody brought
n a sheltered position between two rocks, and, in
onse to his whistle-call, Buckskin, his peerless horse,
e rushing down toward him like a whirlwind, snort-
neighs.

was such an unusual sight—that of the riderless
al thus careering among them so unexpectedly—
the savages, beset in their turn, and with their own

saddles being rapidly emptied by the whistling bullets
from above, hardly knew what to make of it.

"Good boy! noble boy!" cried Buffalo Bill, caressing
Buckskin's nose and neck as the animal halted at his
side. "I knew I could depend on you, my hearty!"

Then he was in the saddle at a bound and continuing
his rush toward the hostile position, in order to double
around the base of the slope and make his return by a
way comparatively out of range.

Having retained only a hunting-knife and a couple of
revolvers in his belt, however, he could not afford to
venture farther than was necessary to draw the redskins'
fire and at the same time give him a general sweeping
view of their preparations.

He was returning as he had intended, when five war-
riors—including War Dog, came charging down hill
upon him in a perfect frenzy of mingled revenge and
fear.

"So be it!" muttered Cody, between his teeth, a re-
volver in either hand. "I'm suited."

At a mere pressure of the knee the noble Buckskin had
come to statute-like halt in the rocky path.

Even a couple of tomahawks whizzing simultaneously
past his ears, one of them narrowly missing his rider's
head, did not cause him to budge an inch or move a
muscle.

At the same instant Cody let out with both revolvers,
dropping the two hatchet-throwers, who were foremost,
out of their saddles.

Then the two ponies collided upon Buckskin with a
shock that hurled them to the ground, and before their
riders could disengage themselves from the tangle both
stiffened out beneath the floundering animals, each with
a bullet in his skull, while a fifth ball brought the mus-
tang of the fifth and last assailant—War Dog himself—
to his knees, with the shot in its throat.

War Dog went flying far over the stricken brute's
head, losing his rifle, but making a fierce lunge at the
saddle-throned Border King during his flight.

At another touch of the knee Buckskin spun around
as upon a pivot, but before his rider could get in a last
fatal shot the fugitive had sprung upon one of the rider-
less ponies, and galloped, whooping, out of sight.

Buffalo Bill reined up for an instant, while looking
down upon his victims.

But the Indians were already on the point of charging
up the slope, and he spurred on.

"Here they come!" he exclaimed, once more dismount-
ing among his faithful followers. "Steady now, my men.
We'll have to pump out lead upon 'em fast and sure, or
we're goners."

Wild Bill had likewise been studying the ground and
hostile preparations attentively.

"They're still six to our one," said he, calmly. "We'll
be able to beat back a first assault, but not a second.
There's still a little spare time; Bill, come with me a
minute, if you please."

He led the way back to where he had bestowed the
half-barrel of gunpowder.

"There's something else in it besides powder, though
exactly what no one can tell," he observed, again exam-
ining the cask. "But we'll take our chances for it be-
ing rack-rock or even worse."

He explained himself more fully. Then, with Cody's

assistance, he placed the cask well out of sight in the low fork of a tree, and applied an improvised time-fuse, to be lighted at the proper moment.

"That'll do for the present, I reckon," said Wild Bill. "Now, if we have to abandon this clump, Bill, where's the best place to make our next stand?"

Buffalo Bill looked out and down toward the broad and foaming creek-ford.

"There!" he replied, pointing to a tree-tufted little islet midway in the boiling waters.

"Exactly!" with an approving nod of the head. "And that fuse is a ten-minute one, which will give the reds time to just get well into possession of this clump of trees after we've deserted it. Come on!"

CHAPTER XV.

BY FIRE AND FLOOD.

The dauntless brace of pards stepped back to their general defense line at the north side of the clump.

As they did so the entire body of mounted savages suddenly broke from cover, and came galloping up the slope in a serried, headlong charge.

"The blasted fools, not to divide an' take us on two sides!" growled Wild Bill, half under his breath while taking his station in line with the others. "However," grimly, "that's their outlook."

"Wait for the word, boys!" sang out Buffalo Bill cheerily, "but when you get it loosen out on 'em for all you're worth."

He waited until the oncoming column was within less than two hundred yards before giving it.

Then the fifteen or more breech-loaders suddenly opened with a fire that was just withering and little less than a continuous stream of volleying death.

Notwithstanding the withering fire which decimated them at every rod of ground they gained, and which they could make no effective response to in kind, they did not as a body finally waver in their onward rush until almost within a lariat's length of the clump skirt, when the slaughter was simply appalling.

Even then they might have succeeded in carrying the position, but for a sudden inspiration on the part of Wild Bill.

His own fine and powerful horse was hardly more than an arm's length back from where he crouched in the fire-spitting defense line.

"Keep clear of hitting me!" he suddenly thundered out. "I've got a little private business d'rectly in front."

The next instant he was in the saddle, and charging out upon a knot of the more foremost, a revolver in his right hand, his huge hunting-knife in his left.

He was suddenly among them like a bolt.

The group consisted of eight or ten brawny warriors, including War Dog.

Two of them instantly went down before him, a bullet in the breast of each; a third was drawing an arrow to the head, but tumbled out of the saddle, almost decapitated, before he could let it fly, by a descending knife-stroke; and then, as the knot was still further disentangled by three more of the great Silent Sureshot's bullets, War Dog himself spurred against him with up-lifted tomahawk, but only to have his own stroke cleverly

evaded, and then to be hurled back out of the saddle by a tremendous hilt-blow delivered squarely between the eyes.

"Hooray fer our side!" yelled Tomahawk Tom, waking up effectually at last. "If this hyar is but a show, I'm inter it tooth an' nail, boots, breeches."

He had been Wild Bill's elbow companion in the defense line, and before him lay a small heap of dead savages, collected one by one from the near-at-hand.

Suiting the action to the word he dropped his hatchets and began to throw the hatchets with the energy and precision which was his fighting specialty and had earned for him his characteristic name.

The result was such as might have followed a bladed lightning stroke.

Indian after Indian went tumbling out of the saddle in swift succession, and more or less mutilated by the weapons.

In the meantime, the remaining Rescuers had not an instant ceased their efforts.

It was, more than even savage nature could stand.

The charging column finally broke, and fled in a temporary panic down the slope, leaving more than a dozen of their braves dead or dying on the ground.

"It was our level best, an' all of it," coolly remarked Wild Bill, returning to cover. "But it's more'n worth the hope to do again."

"That is true," said Cody.

The next measures were promptly taken in touch with the plans already agreed on by the two leaders, for the savages could already be seen preparing to enter the fight.

Two men, Stark and Bevins, were temporarily detached to keep up a show of defense, while the rest of the band quietly mounted their horses and got their animals in readiness back among the trees. The plan was touched to the time-fuse attached to the half-bush in the tree-fork.

"Hyar they come ag'in!" shouted the Little Bear. "But, great snakes! look over yonder!"

He was pointing to the farther side of the clump, whence a fresh body of Indians—the same that Cody and his outlaws had welcomed a few hours previous to the Territory frontier line—was just coming in view at a hard gallop, and less than two miles away.

"It's reinforcements," said Buffalo Bill, quietly. "Boys, we must be beforehand in reaching that point down yonder. Forward!"

Then Wild Bill, as the little band were silently slipping out of the clump on their masked retreat, called back:

"Remember, boys, it's only a ten-minute fuse!"

Fortunately the course down to the water's edge was masked not only to the assailants, but also to the reinforcements which were hurrying to their support, though the latter were intent upon gaining the upper ford which was the defenders' objective point.

But the pards had no difficulty in getting there first.

A break down over the rough slope, then a dash through intervening current, with the water almost at their saddles, and the little island was gained and held.

to Bill's first glance then was toward the ap-
 ing newcomers.
 "There's only a score of 'em," he observed. "But I
 recognize that seven-footer at their head. Isn't
 Thunder, Wild Bill?"

Bill nodded in response, quietly adding:
 "Where Big Thunder leads there's blood in the

a series of whoops and volleys from the aban-
 slope told of the second assault being made in that
 on under War Dog.

He could be distinguished amid the general din
 of breech-loaders of the two pards left behind.
 "In ten minutes, Bill?" Wild Bill anxiously de-
 manded of Cody, who had timed the lighting of the fuse
 watch.

"If 'em already gone," replied Buffalo Bill, watch

as an instant of tremendous suspense, for if Stark
 evins lingered too long they would be included in
 catastrophe that was anticipated for the assailants.

However, while a new exultation in the hostile whoops
 of the clump being carried at last, the two hunters
 were spurred into view, and came thundering down
 the bank at a breakneck gallop.

They were already splashing through the ford, en-
 dored by a ringing cheer from the little island, and the
 first rank of savages was just making its appear-
 ance at the clump, when there was a flash, a roar, an
 exploding shock, and, true to its time-fuse, the ex-
 plosion was an accomplished fact.

Bill had been right in his conjecture that the sus-
 cask had contained something else and more de-
 vasive than gunpowder. It had been obtained by some
 Ogallalla bucks in a raid of theirs upon a mining

events, the effects of the explosion were such as
 Buffalo Bill and his men could scarcely have
 dreamed of.

In those who were down on the little island several
 yards distant, were deafened, half prostrated,
 bewildered by the shock.

For the timber clump above and its savage occupants,
 was simply nothing left of them but a blackened,
 disrupted space, strewn with the fragments of
 felled trees and the mutilated bodies of men and

War Dog and five or six of his braves, who had alone
 survived the overwhelming catastrophe by lingering in
 rear of the general assault, came galloping down to
 the ford a few minutes later, uttering affrighted
 cries only to be promptly shot down by the victorious

men, as the smoke and dust cleared away, the Chey-
 reinforcement was seen halted on the western bank
 of the stream, in the utmost panic and dismay.

"This is our golden opportunity for the wind-up of
 the fair," announced Buffalo Bill to his command,
 "by this time had recovered from the shock, were
 mounted behind the masking timber line of the
 island, while the low opposite shore on which the
 men were huddled together was devoid of trees.
 "For a free fight in the open!"

As the word was given the little command suddenly

burst out of their cover, with a hoarse cheer, were in and
 through the ford in less time than it takes to tell it, and
 then, loosening out a leaden hail from their deadly
 breech-loaders, were among the already demoralized red-
 skins.

Then it was a slaughter, then a flight.

Big Thunder and some of his braves, all desperately
 wounded, succeeded in making their escape, to carry the
 appalling tidings to the parent tribe.

One of the escaping redskins was the wounded young
 warrior, whose mount enabled him to carry the news to
 Col. Jack Corter, at Painted Rock, several hours later,
 where he expired after delivering his message.

The victorious pards did not follow up their trail until
 some hours after, and dusk was fast deepening when
 they sighted the twinkling fires of the outlaw encamp-
 ment in the distance, and pitched their own camp on a
 rise of ground offering some natural facilities for de-
 fense, fully a mile to the eastward of the rushing waters
 of the Nestagunta River.

"Boys," somewhat thoughtfully observed Buffalo Bill,
 when supper was cooking, "we've had a hard tussle, but
 our success has been such that I for one can hardly realize
 it even now—without a wound or so much as a scratch
 on our side."

"Hold on, Bill! that's one scratch ag'in us, though,"
 laughingly called out the Little Corporal, holding up his
 left hand, which was slightly streaked with red. "I got
 it among ther briars when breakin' out er ther clump."

"I only wish it hed been ther Border Badits, 'stead er
 ther Cheyennes," growled Tomahawk Towners, moodily.

"Mebbe we'll hev ther hull tribe down on us afore we
 kin git at them white hounds over at Painted Rock."
 And then, at the thought of Lottie still being in the half-
 breed's power, he silently gnashed his teeth, and turned
 away from the fire.

"Uncle Sam's bluecoats may have a finger in the pie
 before that," observed old Enfield, who had blossomed
 out into something almost like geniality since the fight,
 where he had borne his part very creditably. "There's
 three full companies of the Eighth Calvary at Kaw
 Agency, and the murder of them three troopers is yet
 to be reckoned for."

"But it was Colonel Jack and his blood-drinkers who
 did them up, I thort," struck in Stark.

"Good 'nough, young man," was the response. "But it
 was Corter's sprinklin' of Cheyennes among his white
 crew that took the troopers' scalps, you can depend upon
 that."

"An' Allannah's Ogallallas are also likely to take a
 hand," spoke up Wild Bill. "The Cheyennes can't very
 well go wholesale on the warpath without rubbing
 against the Sioux, who hate 'em nat'rally only less than
 they do the Pawnees."

Later on, when the evening meal was finished, one of
 the men on guard duty was perceived coming toward the
 fire, accompanied by a tall blanketed figure on a power-
 fully built cream-colored Indian pony.

"It's Three Arrows," said Buffalo Bill. "He ought to
 be bringing us some news worth having."

Three Arrows, for it was, indeed, he, on dismounting
 by the fire with his accustomed gravity, threw back his
 enveloping poncho.

As he did so an arrow was seen to be impaled in one of its folds.

"What does that mean, Three Arrows?" demanded Cody.

"Cheyenne!" was the laconic response. "Ugh!" seating himself slowly and producing his pipe; "since they begin the war upon us Ogallallas let them look to themselves. When the White Queen strikes she will strike hard."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OUTLAWS AT BAY.

The first part of Three Arrows' story was briefly told.

The arrival of the pard had been duly reported to the outlaw camp at Painted Rock. In making his way from the one camp to the other the young brave had just been pursued by a small war party of Cheyennes, who had somehow put in an appearance. He had escaped their pursuit, but not without one of their hostile arrows piercing his blanket and scratching his skin.

"Not very much, but enough!" he said, while displaying where the shaft had grazed the flesh. "Blood has been drawn—Ogallalla blood! Allannah and her people can ask for no more. Ugh! Up with the hatchet from its long sleep in the ground!"

All this was good for the rescuers, who, if the hostiles thus again interposed them and their outlaw foes, could ask for nothing better than a war between the Sioux—a much more powerful and better organized tribe—and the bloodthirsty Cheyennes.

But the young brave's next and main report was productive of more varied emotions among his hearers.

It dealt with his own and Patty Enfield's joining with the Border Bandits at Elk Creek, the fierce fight and the subsequent ride to Painted Rock.

This, of course, included something more than mere passing mention of the quiet heroism displayed by Hankins and the young outlaw, "Chipper" Melton, and of the former's defense and attitude toward his fair captive both before and since the conflict.

Indeed, Three Arrows was rather disposed to be eulogistic of the half-breed to no little extent in his flowery eloquent vein, when Tomahawk Towners shut him up with a rear.

"No more er that!" bellowed the latter, with a stream of oaths, and he sprang to his feet fairly beside himself with jealous rage. "The idee er thar bein' anything but pizen an' treachery an' cowardice in the half-blood hound! Don't tork ter me! He's on'y cunnin', cunnin' an' connivin' in his black villainy—jess ez a rattler is, on'y a darned sight wuss! I'll hev his heart's blood ter ther last, an' ther blackest drop!"

Three Arrows had looked up haughtily at first, and then smiled. He understood.

"As the white Tomahawk Chief pleases," he replied, while puffing composedly at his pipe. "What is good is good, what is bad is bad. Every man to his own private quarrel. Three Arrows never interferes."

"For Heaven's sake, give us something of a rest, Tom!" commanded Buffalo Bill at last, as the lover was continuing his stormy ravings. "Every one else can't be expected to be such an everlasting, unreasonable fool as you are just now." And then, turning to Three Arrows,

he said, "I suppose Corter and his gang are m' warm reception for us."

The substance of the young Ogallalla's response in other and terser language than his was as follows:

"Corter is at bay. If he has Cheyenne friends south of his fastness at the great rock's foot tongue between the rushing streams, so are the hastening up that way, from the agency forts both him and them to account. You will be on the bank to the north of him, though you will doubtless to whip off more of the Cheyennes to get there even then should the latter fill in and hold the back of you it cannot be for long. Allannah's band must ere long be upon them. Ogallalla blood has been drawn, and it must be avenged. Her spies are everywhere. Even by this time she is informed of the situation. Still, with these disadvantages against your enemy, Big Chief Bill, he can't get you off from Painted Rock, at least for a while. Therefore, look out for tricks and surprises. The red colonel is coarse and brutal, but no man's fool. Three Arrows has said his say."

He rose, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, mounting his pony, rode slowly back into the distance.

The guard was trebled that night around the camp, it being the intention, if not attacked in the time, to delay the continuation of the march toward the outlaw fastness until broad daylight.

At the first gray of dawn, however, the alarm was given, and then the pickets came galloping in with the announcement that a perfect cloud of redskins was advancing upon the camp from the direction of the trees.

But the fire had been extinguished, the position was fairly well chosen—on a rise of ground among several huge rocks, partly masked by a bristling forest of trees.

"Steady, all!" cried out Buffalo Bill, as they dropped into position in the dim half light, after the animals in the clump behind. "We've no rack-rock to help us out this time, but we ought to be as good for standing 'em off as ever."

"No need er rack-rock on this hyar racket!" cried the Little Corporal, who had Towners at bow and old Enfield at the other. "We're all right, Cody."

But a moment or two later Frank Stark, who was between two rocks just behind and above those which gave him a more extensive view of the situation, suddenly shouted, in an astounded voice:

"Good Heavens! just look at the Indians!"

In fact, they seemed to be coming not only in a body but in a small army, a swarming host.

There was a brief, indistinct vision of waving wings and tossing eagle-plumes, but with no other sound than the dull rumble of the leisurely advancing hoof-beats.

Then the rumble became a near-at-hand, grating thunder, a chorus of savage yells, and at the instant the devoted hunters, plying their breech-loading rifles, all they were worth, were girt in by a circle of rifle shots and arrow flights.

They fought rather like fiends than men, those few and desperate few, but likewise as fighting fiends they surrounded by that savage and revengeful host.

the daylight broadened it revealed them still the
s of their position, and with the enemy momen-
recoiling from their swift-volleying front, leaving
ering of dead and dying in his track, but unfor-
ly no longer in the invincible trim to which they
rown somewhat accustomed when similarly as-
l and beset.

of the Ruby cowboys was dead at his gun, and yet
r so desperately wounded as to be apparently past
g for.

nk Stark had just spat out a bullet and two or three
e Jovial little Joe Bevins was temporarily letting up
rifle practice while picking an arrow-head out of
t shoulder. And there was a sprinkling of minor
and casualties almost all along the line.

ever mind, boys!" cried Buffalo Bill, with his accus-
cheerfulness. "Here they come again, but never
le!"

me of us is doing it without saying it!" growled
Bill, as another brave cattleman, who had been
ler to shoulder with him on the left, tumbled back,
dead.

the next minute the horde of redskins were upon and
d them once more.

Thunder, however, one of the leading chiefs in the
s van, which he had found time and opportunity
n himself with after his escape from Elk Creek,
ne of the first to measure his huge length in death
the ground; his swarming companions were being
ated all around him, and still the tireless breech-
s of the hunters played out among them with rapid
evastating effect.

Nevertheless, it finally seemed a foregone conclusion
he latter must inevitably be rubbed out—extermin-
to a man—in another minute, when there was a sud-
diversion perceived in the assailants' rear, accom-
by a clear-toned girlish shout and a series of rifle-
in such rapid succession as to seem almost one link-
port.

y gal—my leetle Patty!" yelled old Enfield, spring-
his feet. "She's coming—only she can loosen out
a breech-loader like that! Hooray! Yes; an', by
r, here she is!"

Girl Rifle Shot, alone and unsupported, but
ted on her peerless Purplette, and dealing out death
on either hand like a winged spirit of destruction,
olely responsible for the happy diversion in the all
hausted frontiersmen's favor.

carried an extra rifle across her lap, in addition to
e from which she paid out the unerring shots, right
left, in a steady hail, while dashing hither and
r like the wind, and seeming to bear a charmed life
f. Bullet, arrow, and tomahawk were directed
st her in vain, while the saddles around her were
ed as if by magic.

en the pards redoubled their exertions, with a rous-
beer.

the same same time there burst forth from some-
at the rear of the clump a counter series of savage
ps and yells, accompanied by a volley of shots and
s, and the enemy broke away in wholesale rout
d the river.

was the White Queen of the Sioux, with a large

body of her Ogallallas to the rescue, and the frontiersmen
were saved.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FLAG OF TRUCE.

The timely and saving presence of Allannah on the
field of battle was speedily explained.

Three Arrows was proudly riding at her right hand,
and it was he who had carried the news of the situation
back to her on the previous night, instead of returning to
the outlaw camp, as had been supposed to be his inten-
tion.

She had already started on the warpath against the
treacherous Cheyennes, and he had been so fortunate as
to meet her and her warriors midway.

"What, Allannah!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, when the
greetings between his men and their rescuers had some-
what subsided; "you do not pursue those murderous
wretches, then?" pointing to the fleeing enemy.

The White Queen of the Sioux shook her head.
Proudly seated upon her magnificent horse, in his gaudy
war trappings, and with her savage bodyguard around,
she seemed like some beautiful Indian goddess, out of a
remote past, into which the traditions of her untutored
people could not reach back.

"No," she replied. "Should not these trophies satisfy
the White Ranch King for the present?" with a gesture
that included the wide-stretching battle-field, with its
ghastly litter of dead and dying. "At all events, the way
is open for him to the river yonder—Allannah will take
care of that, besides protecting his rear. But for the
present we Ogallallas remain here. The insult to our
tribe is so far satisfied."

Ponca Patty had been, on her part, received by the
frontiersmen with enthusiasm.

Still her father was eying her somewhat resentfully
for having hastily spurred over to Allannah's side, after
giving him but a brief filial greeting, and she now com-
pleted his surprise, if not his mortification, by quietly an-
nouncing that she must go back at once to the outlaw
camp.

"What do you want to do that for, you tarnation little
puzzle in petticoats?" the old fellow began to storm.

"Parole on honor, dad," was the response. "Besides,
you don't think I would leave Miss Lottie in the lurch,
do you?"

"It is true," said Allannah, calmly. "The Prairie
Flower must return to the Painted Rock camp for the
present, to keep the captive Prairie White Rose company.
Three Arrows will go back with her."

"I won't stand it," continued old Enfield, who was
naturally much mystified, as was every one else. "Patty,
stop makin' Purplette jump around in that crazy way,
an' come here at my side, where you're goin' ter stay.
I'm your dad, and I command it."

"Can't help it, dad, dear," replied the Girl Rifle Shot,
smilingly. "Parole of honor, you know."

"Parole of fiddlestrings. Have you promised that
blood-drinker, Colonel Jack, to marry him?"

"Do I look like it?"

"But you've given your parole to him not to escape?"

"Well, only in a sort of way, dad."

"But did he consent to furlough you this mornin' fer to help us ag'in his friends, the Cheyennes?"

"No, dad; I took the liberty under previous and superior orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Allannah's." And Patty exchanged a strange look with the White Queen.

Old Enfield restrained a fresh movement of angry impatience, in order to exclaim: "What! an' you'll dare go back to Corter's gang after all this?"

"Oh, you dear old dad!" cried Patty, with her bright, free laugh; "not to know that I would dare anything? Besides, Allannah——"

"Allannah be hanged," roared the trader. "Curse it all, has that bleached-out squaw-witch mesmerized you, as Hankins did Miss Lottie?" Choking with rage, he could articulate no more, though Patty spurred up to his side and patted his cheek, murmuring, half-tearfully, half-laughingly, "Poor, thick-headed old dad! why can't you let things go when they are going all right?"

"Thick-headed, right!" howled Enfield, fairly beside himself. "Blast my buttons, Patty, 'f ye don't recognize my 'thority this minute, I'll disinherit ye, I'll——"

"Peace, Coyote-Snap-at-Nothing," sternly interposed the White Queen, also pushing her horse toward him. "Let the Agency Flower away at once. Three Arrows is in readiness to accompany her."

She waved her hand commandingly, and Patty obediently started off to where Three Arrows was awaiting her.

"Good-by, daddy!" she called out. "And, by the way, Chief Cody, I want to tell you of two good men and true among Corter's gang who ought to be kindly treated, if your crowd should ever get on top."

"Indeed!" said Buffalo Bill. "And who are they, Patty?"

"Half-breed Hankins, who is just a good angel in top-boots toward Miss Lottie, for one," was the reply. "And the other is Mr. Chipper Melton, a young man that I am particularly interested in. That is all." And then away galloped the Girl Rifle Shot, with her escort.

Then it was Tom Towners' turn to begin to fret and fume at the mention of Hankins' hated name in connection with mercy.

But before he could interpose a word, Enfield, controlling the more violent expression of his anger, turned upon Allannah, his rough face contorted with suppressed rage:

"If harm comes to that girl, woe to you, woman!" he hoarsely cried. "There may be occasion for such a misfortune to wring your heart worse than mine."

She gave him a surprised look, hesitated as if tempted to question him, and then passed on to review the preparations her people were making for going into camp.

The frontiersmen, acting under their leader's orders,

only remained upon the field long enough to bury their own dead, and attend to the requirements of the wounded.

The hunters made their camp on the Medicine River, well in among the rocks and trees, and, recuperating from their recent tough battle, devoted themselves to narrowly watching such as was visible in the outlaw camp at the wooded foot of Painted Rock on the opposite shore.

Late in the afternoon several signal shots were seen in the outlaw camp, and a few minutes later a man was seen to ride down to the water's edge and wave a rag appended to the end of his rifle.

"It's Red Rodman," said Flash-shot Frank, as the man was generally recognized.

"I say!" shouted the fellow; "I'm a flag of truce. I come over?"

"What do you think, Bill?" asked Cody of Wilk.

"They're hemmed in, and wish to be allowed to come out," was the surly response. "Yes; talk's cheap. Come."

Buffalo Bill made a sign, but at the same time he was dubious at the rushing stream, which seemed visibly swelling and growing more dangerous every minute.

The outlaw messenger spurred fearlessly into the water by dint of hard scrambling, swimming, and wading, and last succeeded in crossing.

"Er tough pull, by Jinks!" he exclaimed, when he had reached the shore through the trees to where the hunters' evening camp was already kindled.

"What's your errand?" demanded Buffalo Bill. "Corter sent you, of course?"

"Wall, I should say so."

"Be brief with your message, then, whatever it be."

"Bill, Colonel Jack's in er bad box—he acknother corn," was his message in substance. "We 'uns on this side of him, backed as ye are by ther 'uns on the other side, an' three troops of Uncle Sam's bluecoats goin' inter camp, south of him, 'tother side er ther gunta, ye understand, he sees thet he's hemmed in."

"Good! Does he propose to surrender, then?"

"What! to you 'uns?—which'd mean a neck-sever for every man of us. Oh, Crimminy, no!"

"We'll treat with him on no other terms. He'll do what he proposes."

"Ter give up both ther gals, an' then be 'lowed to come out at this ford, an' give ther army boys ther dead promptly."

"Not to be thought of. Eh, men?" And Cody turned to his followers, who at once set up a fierce, repeated shout in support of his words. "We'll take our

cutting back the young women, safe and sound. As the rest, the unprovoked attacks on Ruby must be paid out by the annihilation of Corter and his whole band. Then there was a louder and yet fiercer shout. Redman grew somewhat pale, and moved uneasily in the middle.

That's ther last word, Chief Bill—ther very best ye'll ever hear he asked.

First, last, and all the time."

"All right," with a shrug of the shoulders. "Then ye'll ever come an' take us. An' in this hyar state of ther affairs ye may find ther takin' of Painted Rock, Bill, with ther Ogallallas an ther bluecoats ter back ye, er a harder job than ye'll well handle."

"We'll bide our time."

"No! well, mebbe Colonel Jack won't."

With these words the outlaw messenger abruptly dismounted his horse, dashed through the trees, and once again took to the water.

But the stream had continued to rise so rapidly that before his horse was swept from under him, and, after the most exciting struggle, he succeeded in reaching the opposite shore.

"No!" commented Buffalo Bill. "If we're to be kept here I reckon—with the bluecoats cutting off his retreat back between streams—Colonel Jack and his gang are to be kept by these same freshets just where he is."

The frontiersmen accordingly posted their guards, and, with a comfortable feeling of having their game in hand, went about making themselves easy for the night.

At daybreak, the rain having let up, one of the men on duty came dashing into camp with an alarm.

"The bandits—they're giving us the slip," he shouted.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "Giving us the slip, but how?"

Cody, swimming their horses straight down the Nestor, "a," was the startling reply.

The cornered outlaws were desperate, and scarcely any allowances had been made for the resources of desperate men when brought to bay.

When the frontiersmen had galloped down to a point at the junction of the two furious and swollen streams, a novel and hardly credible sight was revealed to them in the eerie dim light.

It was that of the entire outlaw band—some forty in number, white and red—heading straight down the main stream, in a long and straggling procession, as fast as their horses could swim.

"Pick 'em off!" shouted Buffalo Bill, suiting the action to the word by shooting one of the figures out of the line. "If they effect a landing a mile below, they'll

have a short cut ahead of us back to Ruby. Quick, let not a man escape!"

His men all then began to shoot, though with indifferent success by reason of the uncertain light, the long range, and the constant, undulating movement of the objects aimed at.

One female figure alone was marked among the fugitives, and she was with a single companion toward the rear of the swimmers.

"It is Lottie," announced Cody, bringing his field-glass to bear. "And it is Hankins holding her bridle-rein. I can't make out either Patty or Three Arrows among the rest."

"That's enough fer me," exclaimed a deep, harsh voice. "Good-by!" And a single horseman, separating himself from the frontiersmen, abruptly rode out into the rushing tide.

It was Towners.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE LOVER.

When Red Rodman returned to his outlaw associates, minus his horse and gun, there was general gloom over the discouraging report he brought back with him.

Cortor ripped and swore for a while, but presently quieted down and held a brief consultation.

"They ain't got ther ropes round our gullets yet a while, boys!" he said at last, with an effort at cheerfulness. "Take er good rest to-night, fer I may have some tough work cut out fer ye by daybreak, 'r sooner."

"Colonel Jack!" piped out James, "I'll bet my head I kin suggest a better an' surer plan fer bringin' Buffalo Bill round to your terms than anything you've got in mind."

"What's yours?" demanded the outlaw leader, curiously.

Both Lottie and Patty were standing in the firelight, at the door of the hut which had been assigned to their accommodation.

The boy-fiend's eyes snapped as he pointed first to one young woman, then to the other, and then turned to Corter and the others with a diabolical grin.

"Ain't them two our hostages, Colonel Jack?" he demanded. "Send word ag'in ter Buffalo Bill ter grant your proposition, 'r both these hyar spring chickens' throats 'll be slit inside of an hour. I reckon he'll understand ye then, an'"—with an infernal chuckle, he here drew his hunting-knife and tested its keen edge with his thumb, while leering horribly at the captives—"I'll do the slittin' fer ye."

Patty maintained her calmness, but Lottie, who had never been able to even regard the boy outlaw without an

internal shudder, had grown white; while both Hankins and Three Arrows were looking at him with ill-concealed anger.

"What ye findin' fault with?" snarled the youth, as both Corter and Anderson sought to lead him away, while making light of what he had said. "Look at her!" pointing to Patty with special animosity. "Hev yer even yet called her an' Three Arrows to account fer the comfort they carried to our sworn enemies in this morning's battle?"

"Mind your own consarns, you devil's imp!" cried Corter, fetching the youth an angry cuff as Bill Anderson drew him away. "I'll 'tend ter callin' thet pair er beauties ter account when I get ready." And he flung a savage look at both the Girl Rifle Shot and her attendant.

"Be on your good behavior, Colonel Jack," Patty called out, with her accustomed airiness. "You can't well afford to make threats, with a noose about your amiable throat."

After what seemed to have been a good, long rest, but while it was still pitch-dark, Lottie was awakened by a movement at the hut entrance.

Then she perceived two forms there which, as she sat up, she recognized as belonging to Hankins and the young fellow, Chip Melton.

"It is you, Miss Lottie?" softly called out the half-breed.

"Yes."

"Get up, please, and then wake Miss Patty. There is a movement afoot that we must be somewhat beforehand with."

Lottie obeyed. Of course, both young women were already dressed. When they had risen, Hankins entered the hut, while Melton, from the doorway, beckoned to Patty, who went outside to him. The young outlaw presently returned alone, and, after gathering up the girl's rifle, saddle and some few other belongings, again disappeared.

The half-breed and his captive were alone together. The rain had ceased, and the brightening little fire from without threw enough beams into the interior for them to see one another with tolerable distinctness.

"Your companion will not return," said Hankins, briefly. "It would not otherwise be well. She, with Three Arrows and Melton, have gone on before."

"Please explain, Mr. Hankins," said Lottie, making herself ready for a departure. "Is it a final escape that you are assisting us to make?"

"Hardly that, as yet," he replied. "But I'll tell you."

He then briefly told her of Corter's desperate plan of swimming his band midstream down the Nestagunta at the first streak of dawn, which was near at hand.

"We will go with the rest, you and I. If we to make our contemplated landing a mile below—of which there is grave doubt—and I shall chance of sending you over to your friends' without bringing the vengeance of my wild upon my head—which is still more doubtful—so. But, at least, while you are here with us—it is necessary for you that I should live."

"But Patty and those two?" she queried, after

"They are bent on stealing a march on Corter, ceding him down the river; and perhaps, discontemplated landing below. Three Arrows is ing with the horses. We deemed it best that s not return to bid you good-by."

"But could not we have gone with them?"

Hankins shook his head.

"I have thought it all over," he said. "The a desperate one—such as you, Miss Lottie, safely undertake. I doubt if even Ponca Patt able to pull through, though with Purplette ben and those two faithful men at her side."

"Oh, but why, then, should you have let her such a hazard?"

"It will be more to her taste than to yours." sides, I am not particularly interested in Miss Pa

Lottie hesitated a moment, and then said: "Co I am ready!" But he stayed her with a simple g

"Miss Lottie," said he, abruptly, and with an a sombreness, if not mournfulness, in his tone, erred—wronged you deeply—in what I have done nothing, as you have already been made to un but my honorable love to urge in my excuse.

"Accord me one boon!" he continued, with eagerness. "Say that you at least credit me cerity in my mad and hopeless love for you—ah,

"Well, I do say it, I do credit you with that, th tie at last replied, with as much coldness as s assume.

He thanked her with a grateful gesture, and said:

"One moment more, miss. Of course, you r the magnetic or mesmeric power that I exercis you at the recollection.

"And I suppose you must feel that I could e again, if so minded?"

"Yes, yes; I suppose so."

He smiled sadly, as she remembered it.

"Fear not," he said, gravely. "There is no d my doing so. I shall very likely soon give yo proof of my love, and of my despair. Come, ne camp is already in movement, and I see the hi dawn. We will go now, miss."

When the strange procession was in readines

ing its water retreat from the wave-washed lower there was naturally excitement and rage over the appearance of the Girl Rifle Shot and her two guides, Corter and Anderson being especially infuriated alarmed.

But they got no satisfaction from either Hankins or me, both of whom stood stolidly in line, waiting for turn to take the water, without a word.

"It's all your own fault, Colonel Jack," cackled out the outlaw.

"Shut up, yer gallows-imp!" snarled Corter. "Gab mend nothin'. Besides, 'f we make ther landing in mind, we kin reach back on ter Ruby by a short fore Buffalo Bill an' his gang kin well guess what's me of us."

And then the swimming retreat was begun.

It was continued desperately and in comparative ease, even after the discovery of the retreat on the part of Buffalo Bill and his men, and when the firing began.

"Don't fire back!" called back Corter along his floating gun, even after a saddle or two had been emptied upon. "Cuss 'em! they can't do us much damage in hyar dimness an' this fur off, an' we can't afford ter w away cartridges, if they can. Besides, they can't r us a long way down."

Then a hoarse shout was heard, and Towners, with up-d tomahawk, was seen swimming his horse directly toward Lottie and Hankins.

In spite of the command to the contrary just received, dozen or more outlaw rifles were leveled toward the new-comer, when a strong, imperious voice suddenly shouted out:

"Don't shoot that man! His business is with me he."

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE RUNNING WAVE.

The shout was the half-breed's.

It was obeyed in a measure; at least, no immediate shot fired.

Then, still retaining his grasp on Lottie's bridle-rein, Hankins indicated Towners' near approach, and turned toward her.

"He is coming for you," he said, with something calm in his calmness. "Tell me, yes or no—do you e him?"

"Yes, yes!" she murmured, hardly knowing what she

Then, for she had momentarily turned away her head, there was a ringing, close-at-hand report, shouts from Towners and several others, and she scarcely knew what happened.

But, for all that, Hankins, the half-breed, had just shot

himself dead, and his body was swirling and sinking away down the sweeping tide; his riderless horse had collided against her own so violently as almost to unseat her; and now it was Tomahawk Towners' strong hand that was grasping the bridle-rein, and guiding her back slowly out of the straggling, swimming outlaw line.

"Lottie, it's me!—I've got yer back at last!" she heard Towners say, in mingled exultation and wonder. "An', then, who'd hev thunk it of thet skulkin' half-breed? But, then, perhaps, he war afeard of me, an' jess knowed his jig was up."

But they were not yet out of danger, and outlaw bullets were already whistling about them, while several of the men at the tail-end, including the boy-fiend, were swimming their animals nearer for surer shots.

"Kill 'em—slaughter 'em both," yelled the stripling, leveling his revolver afresh. "Cuss it all! why didn't Colonel Jack let me slit thet gal's throat when I wanted to? If I on'y hev ther chance ag'in——"

Here Towners' tomahawk was let fly from his disengaged hand at last, killing one robber, and then knocking the boy-fiend's pistol out of his hand in the glance off, besides upsetting him into the water.

And then, revolver in hand, Buffalo Bill himself was seen pressing to the rescue on Buckskin.

The noble brute was proying himself no less peerless in the water than on the land.

In fact, he was bearing his gallant rider down upon the group like a perfect streak. Crack, crack, crack! went the remaining shots from the Border King's revolver, each one with more or less effect; and then Towners and his fair charge were free in the passage to the shore.

The shore being regained, Towners and another man were sent off with Lottie to the place under Allannah's care, together with notification to the White Queen of the outlaw's escape from Painted Rock.

The frontiersmen lost no time in continuing the pursuit of the floating outlaws along down the river bank, opening fire upon the fugitives whenever it could be done to advantage.

The latter, however, were not long in disappearing out of harm's way around a rocky bend, where their pursuers could no longer follow and harass them in this way.

There was then nothing for it but to make a detour around behind the point, in the hope of once more coming parallel with and covering the swimmers to better purpose before they could effect the landing on the opposite side, which it had been learned from Lottie they were making for.

The detour, however, took more time than had been anticipated, and the swiftness of the river's current was, moreover, in favor of the swimming fugitives.

As a consequence, by the time the frontiersmen again

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